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THE BUSINESS OF A GENTLEMAN

BY

H. N. DICKINSON

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To the Hon. Aubrey Herbert, M.P.

My dear Aubrey:

You have said that I may put your name upon this page. Many reasons make me glad to do this, but chief among them is the pleasure of giving my book and myself so great a recommendation.

Yours, etc.,

H. N. D.

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The Business of a Gentleman

I

"Bobby, tell them the story of the Voluntary Inspector."

"Not for worlds!"

"Oh, you must."

"No, it 's too awful. It would shock every one. It would corrupt this innocent boy."

"Don't be a fool!"

"These two fellows on the sofa, I never met them till to-day. It will turn out that she is an aunt of one of them and I shall have to fight a duel."

"We have no aunts," said one.

"None whatever," said the other.

"And I," said the boy above mentioned, "am an incorruptibility."

"Very well," said Bobby, "but mind, I don't answer for the consequences."

First he lit his pipe. They were gathered round the fire in the hall of a country house, having returned from shooting the earliest partridges that the law permits to be shot. Yardale was their host. He lay sideways in a large chair, with his legs over one arm and his neck over the other, a pipe full of hot tobacco waving perilously above his eyes as he gazed up at a group of voluptuous figures painted on the ceiling. He was twenty-six years old. That may be

taken as an average age for the party, with the exception of Durwold, a schoolboy, who lay on the hearth-rug like a dead Knight Templar. Two other young men sprawled on a sofa. A fourth sat on a table with the drinks, and swung his legs. A fifth had curled himself Z-shaped in a chair. The last, who was Bobby, sat tailorwise on a cushion in an angle formed by the fender and a large arm-chair.

"It isn't much of a story, after all," he said. "But it 's a damn good lesson in minding your own business. The fact is that some silly asses somewhere have a league of women who go round finding scandals in country villages. Not what Yardale calls scandals, but things like overcrowding in cottages and bad wages and dirty children and drink and intimidation by wicked landlords like me. Well, they sent one of their women down to us, but they made the slight tactical error of telling the rector she was coming. The rector never told us, because of hurting our feelings, but like a cunning old devil he told his gardener and then went off for the day. What he told the gardener exactly nobody has ever found out, but the result was that all the village thought it had something to do with running people in for taking their kids into the public houses. And the result of that was that there was what you call a swelling of the great heart of the people. One woman had been fined for it, just before, under the new Act of Parliament. Not that it mattered much, because I always pay the money when they 're fined for things like that. Anyhow, when the voluntary inspector came, she found all the doors in the village locked, and the blinds down, and nobody would take any notice of her at all. She might as well have called on a row of catacombs. I 'm sorry to make such a long story of it. Of course the next point is that all the boys in my stables are simply young angels. They are all in the village choir, and they swallow my aunt's pills when she thinks they look ill. That 's perfectly true. But they

got wind about the voluntary inspector and they went down to the street, armed with a razor, which sounds very alarming, and they caught her and cut off her skirts. Yes, they did. They took that part of her away. The result was that *as* a voluntary inspector she was ruined. She was no more good at all that day. She shouted and banged at the cottage doors, but the harder she banged the more frightened they were of her. And then, by the special guidance of providence, I happened to ride in on my way back from a district council."

They were grimly pleased by the story; indeed they were more pleased than amused, though Durwold, the schoolboy, beat his legs up and down as he lay upon the hearth-rug and shouted till he groaned with the pain of his own laughter. The others begged Bobby to tell what he had said and done to the voluntary inspector when he found her, but he refused. He said it must remain a secret between himself and his Maker, or that it was at least a thing to be told only to his eldest son on reaching the age of twenty-one.

2

A few minutes later he was engaged in a conversation surprisingly different.

Yardale had taken them to the drawing-room where his mother and grandmother, and his two sisters and several of their friends, were gathered already round the tea-table. Of these, as of the young men, a due account would only mislead the reader, for the names of few of them will be found in the pages to follow. But there was one of whom a word must be said. This was the Duchess of Brackenbury, grandmother of Yardale and of his young cousin Eddie Durwold. The relations between this lady and humanity at large were illustrated by something that happened immediately the young men entered.

"Are you better, Eddie?" said Lady Yardale genially as she poured out tea.

"What from?" he asked.

"The joke that nearly killed you just now in the hall."

He blushed the rich blush of a sixteen-year-old, and began to giggle, saying he wondered how they could have heard him. One of his cousins was unkind enough to enquire with a great show of interest what the joke had been, a question that Lady Yardale had not meant to ask. This stiffened his courage and he looked her amiably and unflinchingly in the eyes and said he had been laughing because Yardale had fallen off a chair. The reproof to curiosity pleased them all, and they laughed, all of them, with the conspicuous exception of the Duchess. She, on the contrary, looked darkly at Durwold. It was unfortunate for him that she used to make her birthday and Christmas tips vary with her varying estimate of his morals. From him she looked at the other young men, without much more approval.

She was a widow of long standing and was well over sixty years of age. She was the centre of a vast organisation of patronage for governesses, companions, secretaries, typists, and clerks, or, to put it plainly, she kept a registry office. She did not profit by it, naturally, but it was a registry office all the same, for employers and employed were corresponding with her from year's end to year's end. With tireless energy and an active but narrow intelligence she had done some good in the world, and some harm too. That she was firm and full of opinions was plainly written on her face. That she was fervently kind-hearted was written less clearly. You had to look deeper to see it.

Her scrutiny of the young men ended by becoming a scrutiny of Bobby Wilton, who was unquestionably the most interesting to look at. He was handsome beyond the point that attracts attention, and his face so clearly showed

the spirit of adventure that the Duchess could well believe the bad things she had heard of him. She was inclined to condemn him, and yet, to her surprise, she was not sure that she did not like him. It was not for his good looks, which she valued at less than nothing. Nor was it because he lacked self-consciousness, for she wrote that off as a matter of mere breeding. But it was because he seemed untainted by the staleness and weariness and cynicism which she was coming to blame most severely in the young men of the day. She liked him because he seemed interested in what he said and did. Eventually she decided that she would do him a certain favour, though she gravely doubted the virtue of his reasons for requiring it.

She rose and crossed the room and sat down near him, active woman that she was, instead of having him brought to her.

"Sir Robert," she said, "I hear that you were asking my daughter about a situation for a typist."

He turned to her with that eager and undivided attention which he was wont to give to every one, friend and foe, a manner well suited for use with duchesses.

"I 'm asking everybody I meet," he said. "I want to find the best place to be had."

"Then I shall probably be able to help you," said she.

"Well, really, that 's most awfully good of you," he said. "'Pon my word, it is really. When I asked Lady Yardale about it I didn't mean to make a fuss. Could you really find a place for her?"

"Probably," said the Duchess, "if she is satisfactory."

"Oh, but she is," said he with all eagerness.

"How old is she?" asked the Duchess.

"Seventeen."

"Pretty?"

"Nothing much."

"Able to write shorthand?"

"Oh yes; my wife has had her taught everything; she has been to classes in Newton Royal."

"What has been her position?"

"A farmer's daughter—quite a small farmer."

"And why is she leaving home?" the Duchess asked.

The question was accompanied by a glance that gave it a barb, or hook, on which Bobby's conscience was to be caught and torn, if it was a guilty one. In the result the Duchess's suspicions were disarmed.

"Why, indeed?" he said hotly. "Because she 's mad; that 's what I say. She has the best life any girl could look for lying on her very doorstep, but her head 's full of crazy nonsense about the dullness of the country, and she 'll throw it all up, she 'll throw it all up, and work a typewriter in an office in London, and marry a consumptive clerk instead of marrying a farmer. We 've all told her, but it 's useless. There 's no stopping people's folly. So all we can do is to get her a good place."

"Well, there are many who share her views," said the Duchess with decision. "Now to put it quite plainly, I suppose she has been in no trouble?"

"Good gracious, no, I hope not," Bobby answered, astonished.

"And she is not the sort of girl to *find* trouble?"

"I couldn't say at all," he replied, with a blank face. "If you like, I 'll ask my wife, but I 'm sure it 's not a bit likely. Not a bit."

"I only ask because one's responsibility is so great," said the Duchess. "Now I suppose she could come to town to be inspected?"

"Rather," said Bobby, eager again. "And I 'm tremendously grateful. I really am."

"Not at all," said the Duchess. "But I hope I shall be able to find her a situation more attractive than what you picture. Life in towns is not so terrible always."

3

At this time, in the autumn of 1911, Mr. Stanborough was still rector of Coulscombe. He was growing old and feeble. It was the period at which his lifelong fondness for the later Roman history was passing in a senile folly that was noticed by visiting archdeacons. "It is written in Gibbon, 'I am the General of Valentinian the Lord of the World,'" he had once announced, as the text for a sermon, and he then preached effectively on the splendour of Christ's universal sovereignty. A good man can find texts anywhere, and preach effectively because it is a good man who preaches. The proportion of Mr. Stanborough's sermons that came bodily out of Gibbon was quite as useful as much that comes in other sermons from the history of the Old Testament, while the lessons he drew were admirable. Latterly, however, decay began to show itself in such things as his choice of imperial names for children whom he baptised, which he would urge upon parents with the half-knowledge that he was acting foolishly. Bobby Wilton, who suffered himself from an excess of Roman history at the dinner table, and on rides, was aware that the habit ran now in silly directions, but was too tender-hearted to interfere. What made the rector irresistible in his hobby was that he knew it to be tedious to others and was often taken with remorse. He had hesitated before he settled upon a copy of his *Lives and Deaths of Six Bad Emperors* as a farewell present for Bessie Wake.

It was after six o'clock when he reached The Three Ashes with the book. The farmer was at home, with his wife and daughter and two of his sons. They all showed great interest in a powerful electric lantern which the rector had with him, given him by Lady Wilton just before her baby was born, in a fit of fright for his safety after dark. This was placed on the table and turned on and off for about ten

minutes. The book also lay on the table, wrapped in brown paper, and they all knew quite well what it was. They talked of indifferent things for a full quarter of an hour before the rector saw his way to achieving the object of his visit.

The conversation was beginning to flag, and they asked him if he was to have a great party at Christmas. He admitted that he was expecting eleven grandchildren, and added with perfect gravity that he intended enlarging the rectory. This was an old joke, though not, as the rector knew, a good one. He changed the topic, and said that the new bridge over the Went was to be of stone, not of wood. That would be a grand bridge. He had seen the plans. It would last for hundreds and hundreds of years. "But it will not be ready for your journey to the station to-morrow, Bessie," he added, with awkward jocosity.

Bessie, a fine round country girl of seventeen, dark haired and dark eyed, laughed self-consciously.

"Be ready when she comes back again, perhaps," said her mother.

"Well, every one is sorry you are going," said the rector, having now reached the goal of his conversation.

"I reckon Master Bobby 'd better have left her as she is," her father observed gloomily.

"It was not Sir Robert, it was the Duchess of Brackenbury," said the girl.

"Why, the Duchess is only one of Master Bobby's friends," said her mother.

"The Duchess did it," said the girl in a tone of finality.

"And what will be your new home?" asked the rector.

"Care of Mrs. Hope, sir, The Arches, Maryhill, Middlesex," she answered; "Mrs. Hope is a friend of the Duchess."

"Maryhill is my old school," said the rector. "I suppose it must be thirty years since I set foot in it. It will have changed a great deal. I don't remember The Arches."

"Mr. Hope is a retired clergyman," the girl said, " and Mrs. Hope is a friend of the Duchess. I am to work for Mrs. Hope mostly, and sometimes for the Duchess."

"When you 've been good," said one of her brothers viciously.

The rector rose from his chair. "I expect things have changed," he said. "I daresay, when you see Maryhill to-morrow, you will hardly believe that I saw a stag in the street there, and the hounds followed it into one of the houses, upstairs into the nursery, where there was a young baby in a cradle. Now, my dear, it was just for the sake of writing your name in it, but I have brought you a book. Do not forget your old home, and may God bless you always."

He handed her the book, looking at it, not at her, and then abruptly said good-night to the others and left the house. One of the boys ran after him with the electric lantern.

4

When the cab had brought Bessie and her boxes to the door of The Arches, Maryhill, Middlesex, the parlour-maid told her that Mrs. Hope was at the Parish Room in East Street with the Little Soldiers, and that she hoped to be joined there by Bessie—or Miss Wake, as Bessie was now called. So Bessie walked back along the old High-Street of Maryhill, which remains a village street even to this day, though a large residential suburb has grown round it, and she turned down the hill into East Street. A policeman pointed out the Parish Room to her. Outside the Room she was greeted by a great good-natured mastiff and she stopped to caress him and be caressed by him. He gave her a kinder welcome than she had had from the cabman or the parlour-maid or the policeman, and she was grateful

because she was now feeling very shy. Yet she was cheered by the thought of the Little Soldiers. She could not guess who or what they were, but the name pleased her.

The Parish Room had a porch and a big oak door like that of a church. Bessie opened the door, after some hesitation, and then, before she could prevent it, the mastiff forced his way inside. She was much distressed by this, thinking it must certainly be wrong. She wondered if she could creep away and so escape responsibility, and whether this would be dishonest. But before she could make up her mind there arose such a tumult of screams and cries from within the Room that she was held transfixed. Though unable to distinguish the words, she could hear that they expressed the utmost panic and indignation. Then the mastiff was led out into the street by a curate and after the curate came a lady who looked so grieved and shocked that Bessie was more frightened than ever.

This lady was about thirty-five years old, and she was pretty in a trivial, commonplace, way. But she had schooled the expression of her face and her voice and deportment into a preternatural demureness. It seemed as though the wind must have changed one day while she was reading an improper novel, leaving her unable ever after to appear otherwise than just about to be shocked. She was short and slight, flat-figured, and quite without affectation in her dress.

"I think you must be Miss Wake," she said to Bessie. "I am Mrs. Hope. What a pity that dog came into the room! But never mind, you must be tired after your journey. There is some tea inside the room. I wanted you to come because you will meet some of my friends, and you will like to see the Little Soldiers."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bessie.

"You mustn't call me ma'am," Mrs. Hope told her;

"you must call me Mrs. Hope. Now let us go back into the room."

Bessie could hardly keep herself from crying aloud in terror at what she saw inside the room. She had never seen or imagined anything like it. She found herself in the midst of forty or fifty boys and girls, from eight to fourteen years old, who were all cripples. Some were hunchbacks, some had lost limbs, some were crooked, all were pale and sickly, and nearly all had faces which Bessie found it terrible to behold. They were listening to a song out of a gramophone, having recovered quickly from the dog's incursion.

"They are from the east end," Mrs. Hope whispered, and Bessie took her to mean the east end of Maryhill. "This is the annual day."

When the song was finished Mrs. Hope led her to a tall thin lady and said, "This is Miss Wake, my new secretary; this is Miss Pree, Miss Wake."

"Aren't they darlings?" said Miss Pree.

Bessie thought they were dreadful, but had a strong feeling that this was wrong of her. "What a lot of them there is, Miss," she exclaimed, in awestruck tones.

"Oh, this is only branch Q," said Miss Pree; "we have hundreds and hundreds more. Every year we seem to be more successful. I 'm the secretary, you know."

"Now, Miss Wake, look at this one," said Mrs. Hope, leading her to a couch that held a hunchback girl with an appallingly sad and suffering face. "This shall be your first little friend. This is little Annie. Our little darling brave Annie. You kiss her, Miss Wake. She has four sores on her leg."

At the sight of this poor victim of industrialism Bessie's eyes filled with tears. She was so sorry for the child that she would have given one of her own clean limbs outright if that could have made it well.

"She is one of our little favourites," said Mrs. Hope "You kiss her."

"I—I can't," sobbed Bessie, suddenly losing control of herself.

Then the child sobbed too, and every one looked round, and there was a painful scene.

"I think you had better go and learn more sense," said Miss Pree, while Mrs. Hope looked sadly grieved, and another lady ran up and smothered little Annie in as many kisses as she could possibly have needed.

That night Bessie cried a great deal in bed, and prayed that Jesus might come again and heal all the cripples as he did before.

5

Mrs. Hope only made one allusion to the catastrophe of the cripple child. "Of course I know you were upset," she said to Bessie, "and I know it was only because you were so sorry for her. Of course we are all sorry for them, but we ought to remember that they do a great deal of good in the world, and we would not be without them if we could. They teach us a great deal that some people need to learn very badly. We ought to be grateful that they are sent to us."

"Now these will be your duties," she said to Bessie in the morning. "After breakfast there will be my letters, and you will open them and sort them, and then I shall come and dictate the answers. Then you will type them out, and after that Mr. Hope has sometimes a few letters which you could do for him. Then after lunch I shall generally want you to go and do some work for some of my friends, Miss Pree or Mrs. Brimston or Miss Agg, or even Miss Baker if she is in Maryhill, and that will mean sometimes walking through the town, and I want to warn you

not to pay any attention to the schoolboys; they walk about all over the town, and——"

"Mr. Stanborough, ma'am, that 's our rector, he was one of them once," said Bessie brightly.

"You really must try not to call me ma'am," Mrs. Hope replied. "If your rector used to be at school here it will make it interesting for you to see the buildings he used to be among. Then when you have finished the work in the afternoon I want you always to give two good hours to reading. But I do not want you ever to borrow books from Miss Baker. You may borrow from Miss Agg, but not from Miss Baker."

"I brought a book the rector gave me about the bad Emperors of Rome," said Bessie with interest.

"Your rector seems to be very peculiar," said Mrs. Hope. "But you will find plenty of books in Mr. Hope's library to tell you all you need to know at present about the lives of the poor and the right way to treat them. That is the work you will be doing, and so that is what you will find it most useful to read about. And I want to say to you, Miss Wake, that I shall take a great interest in you, and being with me ought to give you the opportunity of making a good start. We are very humble people ourselves but we have some very powerful friends. I shall never blame you for leaving me and rising to some higher work when you are fit for it. You will have plenty of chances, if you are clever and industrious, and you might end by being in a really great position. Women have great opportunities in these days. You ought to let that thought be an inspiration to you."

6

"The Arches" was the sort of house that advertisements describe as having "eleven bedrooms and three good re-

ception-rooms." Mr. and Mrs. Hope had no children, and kept only three servants, so that the eleven bedrooms were not all needed as bedrooms. Several of the larger ones were used as sitting-rooms and work-rooms. One was the library of Mr. Hope, from which he very seldom emerged. He was an amiable but obscure man, many years older than his wife, wrecked by the strain of work in his early days as a curate, and now engaged upon theological writings which he well knew to be of poor quality. His attitude towards his wife can be seen by the light of a single fact. During ten years of married life he had never confessed to her that the income which kept them both in comfort and paid for her innumerable activities among the poor was drawn exclusively from shares in a brewery.

Another of the eleven bedrooms was known as the business room. This was where Bessie worked, kept her typewriter, and read the books given her to read. In this room also, nestling in countless pigeonholes, were the papers connected with Mrs. Hope's good works.

7

Mrs. Hope gave Bessie rule over all the pigeonholes in the business room. There was one set labelled from A to Z for letters from unclassified persons on unclassified subjects. But these were rather empty. The classified pigeonholes were much better filled. One lot was devoted to the Little Soldiers. Another lot, much bigger, held information about the characters of the people of the parish, sixteen holes being given to the characters of the poor and one hole to the characters of the rich. This hole contained a set of intercepted love letters from a schoolboy to a nursemaid, all of which Bessie read one morning with rapture and amazement. Here also was to be found an acrimonious correspondence between Mrs. Hope and a Mrs.

Berkeley as to whether the latter ought to have asked a Mr. Callaghan to help at the children's Easter Monday Evening. Bessie read this with astonishment, marvelling that any one should have dared to suggest that Mrs. Hope had said what was not true, and wondering much what poor Mr. Callaghan had done to be in such disgrace. There was also a bundle of letters about the curate, but Bessie did not read these.

One of the pigeonholes was labelled "Denbury," and the letters inside were about a strike in some pottery works. They were very dull. Most of them were written by Miss Baker.

Other pigeonholes, more or less well filled, were labelled "London Society for Municipal Extension," "Peace Union" "Home League," "Y. M. C. A.," "Anti-Nicotine Union," "Voluntary Inspection Association," "Coal and Blanket Club," "Straight Talks Club," "London Society," "Purity Chatting League," "Christian Social Union," "Humane Diet Union," "Partial Dipsomaniacs' Home." The contents of most of them were very dull indeed.

Then there were the classified pigeonholes which held letters from special persons. Of these latter the best filled was that labelled "Miss Baker." But Bessie had not met Miss Baker, so she did not read them.

8

"We ought all to wish," said Mrs. Hope one evening, in her most intimate vein, "that you will some day be taken into Miss Baker's service. If you were, it would be as much as you could possibly wish for. Miss Baker is one of the greatest women in the world. She is far more clever than any one you have ever met. She is coming to tea with us on Saturday. She is a really great influence in England, and I am going to give you her books to read after you have

met her. They are novels, so you will enjoy them. She knows Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Keir Hardie and she has one of the greatest minds we have amongst us. I suppose she is more truly intellectual even than Mr. Lloyd George. Years ago she used always to live in Maryhill and she did a great deal of work here. But she has very little time for that now, except when she can get away from all her work in London. But she still has her house here, and she still does work here sometimes, especially one very important work which she is particularly interested in. What I want to tell you about her is that it is very sad but she is not a Christian. She does not believe in God or Christ. It is very odd, because she does such a great deal of good work. But it teaches us that God moves in mysterious ways. Intellectual people very often do not believe in God. Mr. Hope thinks that the reason why Miss Baker does not believe in God is that when she first wrote her books she was laughed at a great deal, because people did not know what a great intellect she has. Mr. Hope thinks that is the explanation. But now I have warned you about it you will know, and it will be a great honour for you to meet such a famous woman. Do you know, a great many of the dreadful things that have been found out about peers and peeresses have been found out by Miss Baker all by herself! She has made a study of that subject, and she has such a wonderful mind that she was able to guess a great many things which everybody now feels sure are true. And the wonderful thing is that she has been able to learn all about the vices of the poor too. She knows the great towns and she has done a great deal of the voluntary inspection in country districts. She has such a sympathy with the poor that even some of the Labour members of Parliament have sometimes consulted her. At the present moment she is very busy about the working men and women at Denbury who are striking against their cruel employer.

She is really their leader, and she is doing wonderful work, and she has written a novel specially about them, and about their employer, of course. Now I think you are a very lucky girl to be going to meet such a great woman, and I shouldn't wonder if she had something specially to say to you. She is going to be one of the rulers of England, you know, and we can't tell that you won't be one of the rulers of England too some day. Small beginnings lead to great endings sometimes."

And thus Mrs. Hope herself ended. Her discourse was more like a letter than a conversation, which was inevitable because there was no one to interrupt her and not the remotest fear of a difference of opinion. She ended, serene, and secure, and altogether happy.

9

Saturday came, a fine day at the end of October, and Miss Baker entered The Arches at ten minutes to four in the afternoon. Bessie was in the drawing-room when she was brought in, and was introduced by Mrs. Hope. Miss Baker gave her no more than a casual nod, and sat down in one of the arm-chairs by the fireplace. Mrs. Hope at once began to give an account of her success in the collection of money for the Denbury strikers.

Deeply as Bessie was prepared to be impressed by Miss Baker she had not expected the half of what she saw. She was awed beyond measure, for Miss Baker was utterly different from Mrs. Hope and Miss Agg and Miss Pree and the other important ladies of Maryhill. Miss Baker had a personality, and could have staggered firmer minds than Bessie's. Though she said nothing but what was gruffly good-natured, and though she directed her fierce eyes at nothing but the fire, she oppressed the atmosphere of Mrs. Hope's pretty drawing-room as thunder oppresses a summer

day. She was large, angular, and bony, and was dressed in such a way as to emphasise these characteristics, by accident indeed, for she would have scorned the affectation of looking wilfully a guy. Three quarters of her person was enveloped in a closely fitting coat of sombre grey serge. Above this were a collar and tie such as are worn by men. Below it was a black skirt which she had placed slightly crooked upon her waist so that it hung awry. Her hat was like a clergyman's, except that it was grey and sparingly trimmed with satin to match.

Bessie could not look at Miss Baker without fearing every moment that she would say something very disagreeable. It was that which inspired awe. Miss Baker's face itself was disagreeable. Her brow was broad and frowning. Her eyes were dark and angry. Her complexion was sallow. Her mouth was a picture of discontent. Thus, clever and bitter as she looked, it was to be supposed that she would be snappish. Yet she was not. On the contrary, she was tolerant and easy-going and her manner was like an eternal shrug of the shoulders. She was forty-six years old, and had enjoyed ample opportunities of learning to keep her temper. Before success came to her, before she learned that people would read her writings if they were sufficiently libellous, she had passed through several schools of disappointment. The poems and novels of her hopeful years had met with ridicule. Most of her associates had turned out to be fools. By none of those who are gay and splendid in life had she ever been loved, or even liked, and she knew it; she knew it so well that a thousand blighted instincts were wound together in her heart to make the scourge of vengeance with which she lashed the rich and powerful and happy.

Bessie, a poor typist, had no need to fear her. She was in no danger even of a sharp word or glance. Yet there were others, hardly less obscure, at whom Miss Baker

condescended to strike when the mood was on her. Though dukes and capitalists, and nothing meaner, were the usual objects of her attack, and though the Labour politicians had lately welcomed her assistance, she did not altogether forget the simpler pleasures of her past. It was not only by collecting subscriptions and donations that the ladies of Maryhill were able to give her what she liked and wanted.

She drank her tea and ate her bread and butter while she listened indifferently to Mrs. Hope's tale of donations asked and obtained for the Denbury strikers. Her comments were brief and commonplace, and she never looked Mrs. Hope in the eyes, though occasionally she glanced at Bessie. At about half-past four she began to put on her gloves and said that she must "start." She asked, in her gruff and casual voice, if Miss Wake could come with her.

"You would enjoy a walk with Miss Baker, wouldn't you?" said Mrs. Hope, in the tone which expects, as the Latin Grammars say, an affirmative answer.

Bessie ran off and put on her hat and jacket and found Miss Baker waiting in the hall. "Come along, it is late," she said.

As they went out of the garden gate they saw two of the schoolboys standing in talk. The boys said "good-night" to one another just as Bessie was shutting the gate. One boy walked on towards the town, going ahead of Bessie and Miss Baker; the other went in the opposite direction.

"The school will be brought under the Government one day," said Miss Baker, presently, "and thrown open to boys and girls of all classes. You must walk faster, Miss Wake. Did you realise that every one of these boys is the son of rich people? Maryhill School is as much a rich man's monopoly as the Court of Appeal and the Order of the Garter. Did you notice those two boys at the gate?"

"Yes, I saw them," said Bessie.

"Do you think you would know them again?"

"Oh, I don't think I should, Miss Baker."

"Could you describe either of them to me now?"

"What? Tell you what they looked like?"

"Yes. See if you can do that. Use your memory."

"Well, one of them was tall and had his hands in his pockets, and the other one had a laughing sort of face," Bessie said, after due reflection.

"You will have to do a great deal better than that," Miss Baker observed. "Now listen to me. I had no time to notice both of them, so I took no trouble with the one who went the other way, and gave all my attention to the one who has gone on in front of us. He was about five feet eight inches tall, and had a rolling, swaggering walk until he started to go on in such a hurry. He had very black straight hair, thick and glossy, and a pale face. You were quite right, he had a laughing sort of face, as you put it. He had dark brown eyes. He wore an upright collar with the corners turned down. He was about sixteen or seventeen years old. I was able to notice all that, and if we had chosen to follow him we could have found out which of the school houses he went back to."

Bessie thought this was wonderful, and said so. She wondered which of her accomplishments Miss Baker would exhibit next.

"You will soon learn to be observant if you try," Miss Baker said as they walked on through the high-street. "How many of the masters' houses do you know?"

"None of them, I 'm afraid," said Bessie. "I only know Miss Agg's house, and the Vicarage, and Miss Pree's and ——"

"Oh, those are not masters' houses," Miss Baker told her. "Now I will teach you two of them. That is Mr. Sifton's on the left with the tall chimneys, and this one on the right with the blue front door is Mr. Mandeville's. Now, you remember those."

Silence ensued, and they walked on.

"Our rector was at school here many years ago and he remembers seeing a stag in this street, and the hounds after it," said Bessie presently.

"H'm," said Miss Baker. "We are not hunting stags this evening."

The street was full of boys, some strolling along the pavement, some walking arm in arm in line in the middle of the road. The town looked pleasantly cheerful and busy. But presently Miss Baker took Bessie up the hill leading to the church, and there were not many boys here. The light was failing. They entered the churchyard, where there are a number of fine elms standing here and there among the tombstones.

"We will wait here, for a moment," said Miss Baker, pointing to two trees near the wall of the churchyard. "It is about this time in the evening that some of the boys have a habit of coming to meet girls in the churchyard or in the paths down there. Some years ago I used to do a great deal of inspection work here, and recently I have been able to do a little more, though I can't continue it. We wish you to learn this work."

"Really!" said Bessie.

"Yes; there is no need to go on talking now."

They waited, but nothing occurred. No one passed along the churchyard path.

"We will move to those trees over there," Miss Baker whispered.

They did so, and waited in silence for about ten minutes. Bessie was greatly excited. She remembered the intercepted letters in the pigeonhole. But the inspection had no luck to-night, and presently Miss Baker tapped her foot impatiently on the grass, which happened to be damp. "We will move down the path to the wood," she said.

They returned across the grass to the main path through

the churchyard, and took the direction suggested. As they did so, they heard from ahead of them the sound of the blowing of a penny tin trumpet—toot-te-toot-toot-toot-toot-toot. It was immediately followed by a similar sound from behind, on a higher note, teet-te-teet-teet-teet-teet-teet.

"What were those?" Bessie asked.

"It may be some children," said Miss Baker in a peculiar tone. "Come on now, quickly."

They walked rapidly towards the other end of the churchyard; before they reached it, both the trumpets had sounded again, one still ahead, the other behind. Miss Baker walked yet faster. They descended a steep hill, for the churchyard extends down the slope, and came to a gate leading out to a lonely road. They passed through. There, in the road, twenty yards in front of them, they saw one of the schoolboys. Both the trumpets sounded once more.

Little as Bessie understood the art of inspection she felt sure that the trumpets did not usually form part of it. She could clearly see that they must afford a warning to those who were to be inspected. She was also aware that there was agitation in Miss Baker's mind and anger in her heart. Suddenly Miss Baker seized her arm and turned her aside into a passage that ran between high wooden palings through the copse to the right. Within the mouth of this passage they waited. If the boy in front had thought that they would follow him patiently while he trumpeted forth their approach he was mistaken. In less than a minute he came swinging back round the corner into the passage. He had doubtless meant to follow them. But Miss Baker's ruse had succeeded, for the boy now almost ran into her arms. It was he whom she had so fully observed outside Mrs. Hope's gate.

"Give me that trumpet," she commanded.

For reply, the boy took a step back and sounded the

trumpet again. Then he put it, with his hands, behind his back. He had precisely the laughing expression which had been noticed. "As I always say to my great-grandfather," he remarked, looking her in the eyes and speaking in a clear pleasant voice, "the boy scouts are a very pernicious movement."

"If you do not give me that trumpet it will be the worse for you," said Miss Baker, very angrily.

"I blow my own trumpet," he answered, and blew it once more.

"If you can follow me, I can follow you," Miss Baker threatened.

"All right," said he. "Good-bye! My friend will do the rest of the trumpeting this evening," and then, running a few yards down the passage, he leaped up to the top of the palings and swung himself lightly over them. From the darkness of the wood they heard his trumpet again.

"We had better go home," said Miss Baker ominously. "At present we are doing more harm than good."

10

Mrs. Hope was quite tender and loving in her sympathy with Bessie about the afternoon's disaster. It was clear that the present generation of boys had come to recognise Miss Baker as a former generation had once recognised her in the past. It did not really signify, because Miss Baker was too much occupied in London and at Denbury to be able to spare much time for Maryhill now. The only serious aspect of the matter was that Bessie herself might have been recognised and remembered as one of Miss Baker's assistants, which would greatly impair her value as an inspector. Miss Baker's own opinion, however, was that this had not occurred. The mantle was handed down in good hope that the moths were not in it.

"You ought to be very proud," Mrs. Hope told her, "that we should trust you with this work. Of course it is work that we should never give to a girl we did not absolutely trust. But there will be more and more of this sort of work done in England now, and it will be very good for you to learn it early. If you do this humble work well, you may one day be one of the voluntary inspectors, or you may be employed by the Government and have really great powers in some part of the country. You will go out now every half-holiday afternoon, except when it is wet, and you will see what information you can bring us back, both about the boys and about the girls too if you can manage it. We shall want to know what the boys are like and what houses they go back to. Even if they only go to smoke cigarettes it is quite worth while taking trouble because of course one thing leads to another and the smoking in itself is quite worth while. All the information is very useful. We can very often get the boys punished and we can nearly always make use of the information about the girls. But of course you must be very careful and remember your responsibilities."

II

So Bessie started in the career which might lead her to such a great position, if she had talent; to be one of those like Miss Baker who punish the rich for being rich and the poor for being poor, make the rich poor and the poor virtuous, and perhaps even lead the rich through poverty into virtue. Subjection needs inspection, even in barbarous countries, and so Bessie was to begin by inspecting. First she was to inspect the churchyard; afterwards she might hope to inspect the houses in East Street or Lingbury Lane when Miss Agg should go higher. Might she not hope that one day it would be Blenheim or Chatsworth or Lambeth?

Fortune smiled on her from the very outset. On her first assumption of her duties she had not walked for ten seconds beyond the further gate of the churchyard before she found, standing in the passage on the right, a girl of about her own age talking with the very boy who had blown the trumpet in front of Miss Baker on the previous Saturday. The capture was complete. She had reached them before they had a suspicion that any one was near. She had plenty of time to study their appearance, and the guilty surprise they showed at last when they perceived her presence removed all doubt that this was a genuine case for inspection. Then the girl ran away down the passage, and the boy stood covering her retreat, his hands in his pockets, his legs apart, and his face once more adorned with the most genial of smiles.

"How-do-you-do?" he said. "Are you the new spy?"

Poor Bessie felt suddenly ashamed of herself; it was the first distinguishable emotion that had visited her in connection with her new duties. "I 'm Bessie—Miss Wake," she faltered. "I 'm inspecting."

"Well that *is* jolly," said the boy, whose face became more and more merry as hers became more distressed. "Now I expect what would help you most of all would be to have my name. I 'm very sorry about that girl who has run away, but I can't tell you *her* name, partly because it wouldn't be honourable and partly because I don't really know what it is, as I do yours, Bessie. You 've told me *your* name, you see, and she hasn't. But my name is Durwold, D-U-R-W-O-L-D, and my initials are C. E. M., which spells Kem, and I am in Mr. Robinson's house, which is in the High-Street, and I was born in London on the twentieth of June, eighteen hundred and ninety-five and christened shortly afterwards by the Right Reverend His Eminence the Most Holy Prince Cardinal Spifkins. Now that 's all true except the last."

"Oh sir!" said Bessie, who was, if the expression be allowed, quite unmanned.

"Now, do you think you will be able to remember it all?" he said, beaming with amusement.

"Oh yes, sir," she faltered.

"Well, then, I should go straight away and tell Mr. Robinson before you forget it," said he.

"It isn't Mr. Robinson, it 's Mrs. Hope I ought to tell,' she said, being crimson with embarrassment and much more interesting to behold in the stress of her trouble than at ordinary times.

"Oh! Mrs. Hope, is it?" he said. "Well, of course I haven't the least idea who Mrs. Hope is, but I suppose *she* tells Mr. Robinson, doesn't she?"

"Yes sir, I 'm afraid so," Bessie murmured. "And I 'm afraid it gets you into trouble, sir, doesn't it?"

"Oh, heaps!" he exclaimed, more cheerfully than ever. "But why don't you go back and tell the news before you forget it? You won't catch any other fellows here to-night; you won't really, 'pon my word of honour. Because I shall warn 'em, you see. Why don't you go back at once and tell?"

"Oh sir," she said, "I don't like to. I can't bear to."

"I say! You 're not much of a spy," he replied.

"You 've been so good to me," she murmured.

"Look here," he said, quite gravely, "I 've got something to say to you presently, but we 'll get the business done first. It won't make any difference how you answer me. If you like to let me off, you know, so much the better. But if you *must* tell, you *must*. All I say is that you ought to say straight away now whether you are going to tell or not. Don't you think that 's fair?"

It was a dreadful moment. There was an awful battle between duty and inclination, not to mention the battle between duty and charity.

The boy broke again into radiant smiles.

"Of course I don't want to influence your decision," he said, "But I do think you ought to say Yes or No. I think that 's fair."

"I 'll say No," Bessie gasped hoarsely.

"That means you refuse to let me off, I suppose," he answered, knowing perfectly well that it meant the contrary. "Well, never mind, I shan't bear any malice. It 's your duty, I know."

She looked up, and found his eyes twinkling delightfully, and her spirit was moved to distress. "Oh," she said, "I meant I *would* let you off; I mean, I meant I would *not* tell."

"By Jove," he said; "well, I 'm jolly glad to hear it. I should have got into no end of a row. First I should have been decimated like a regiment of soldiers and then they would have sent my mamma into ninety-nine fits by telling her that I was a regular rip. Well, *that 's* all over, and now I 'll tell you what I was going to say. I was going to say I didn't a bit mind your making that girl run away, because she was as dull as ditchwater and I was quite tired of her, and I 've got *you* to talk to instead, and you are absolutely A 1 beautiful. And if you would believe it, which you won't, you haven't got anything to be afraid of in me, because I am a Catholic and I have to confess to my priest every fortnight. So I jolly well do everything the old boy doesn't really mind and I keep clear of what he *does* mind. Now after that *pourparler* what do you think about it?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," said Bessie.

"Well then, let *me* say *this*," he replied. "The real and true reason why I have come to these *purlieus* is that I wish to smoke a cigarette. Do you think you would mind if I did?"

"Oh no, sir," she said. "My brothers do, but father still smokes a pipe."

"In the holidays I follow the example of your father," said Durwold. "In the term I follow the example of your brothers. Look here, Bessie, you really are beautiful, though it sounds uncomplimentary to say it while I am lighting this. What I want to say is this: Do you think we could sometimes meet and talk, in the intervals of your duty, without either of us falling in love? I mustn't fall in love because my mamma has settled who I 've got to marry. And *you* mustn't, because it simply wouldn't do at all. But do you think we could sometimes meet on strictly non-party lines and discuss the deplorable state of the weather? What do you think?"

"I 'm thinking about when I get back to Mrs. Hope," said Bessie in much distress. "What shall I say to her? I ought to be able to give her descriptions of boys, and show what I 've been doing, and have things to tell."

"Oh, is *that* it?" said Durwold. "Well, I will soon make *that* all right. I will give you the descriptions of lots and lots of boys and of half the girls in Maryhill. I 'll give you the descriptions of the head of the school, and the captain of the footer eleven, and a boy who is ill with pneumonia and may be dead by to-morrow, and a fellow who had me licked last night, and as many more as you could possibly want. I will write it all down for you and you can sit on a tombstone and learn it by heart. And then I 'll hear you, to see if you know it."

"I 'm afraid that wouldn't do," said Bessie.

"Well, I 'm afraid it really *wouldn't*," he agreed. "But what I really advise is this. Now you won't mind my giving you advice, *will* you. I advise you to go back and tell Mrs. Hope that you found so many boys here that you were quite confused, and those you followed all got away from you before you could see what they were like. It is your first shot, so no one can really blame you. And there 's just *one* thing, Bessie, before we say good-night, if you

really *must* go. Whenever you come down here any night in the course of your delightful avocation you are sure to find me here and I give you my word of honour that I 'll never say a word to any other girl if you 'll let me talk to *you*. You 're beautiful, you know, and that 's why I promise. Do you see, Bessie? And when you are tired of me you can take my name to Mrs. Hope and get me into no end of a row. And I shan't mind one bit if only I 've had some talks with you first. Can you remember all that long allocution? Do you want to go away? Well, go along, and remember that whatever happens I shall be here on Thursday."

12

Mr. Charles Edward Marcus Durwold was an utterly reckless young gentleman, and recklessness is one of the most fascinating qualities of the male animal. In Bessie's eyes he was of the same denomination and value as the young men in pink coats who looked nice on the hills and in the vales of her own country, or the Prince Imperial whose death was depicted in the oleograph at home, or Sir Robert Wilton when he came to talk with her father on some evening in winter. But Durwold had done what had not been done either by the pink coats or the Prince or by Wilton. He had taken notice of her. The result was that the impression made by him was more enduring. More and more she thought about him. Also she began to be afraid of meeting him again, and on the occasion of the next half-holiday she pleaded a headache and was excused from her duties in the churchyard. The next morning, while she was carrying the flower vases to the pantry, a letter was put into her hand by the boy who came to clean the boots and knives.

She guessed the truth. She fled to her bedroom to con-

ceal both the letter and her blushes. She opened the envelope, and found a letter written on paper stamped with the school crest and the name of Mr. Robinson's house. It read thus: "November 2nd, 1911. Dear Miss Bessie Wake: It was not kind of you not to come this afternoon. Was it? There is nothing to stop you putting this note in the headmaster's letter box, if you like, but if you don't I think you ought to come on Saturday. That is only fair. Yours sincerely, C. E. M. Durwold."

Bessie had a writing-case which locked with a key about the size of an earwig. Into this she put Master Durwold's note, and into this she put all other notes which she received from him in the weeks that followed. She locked the writing-case and returned to her duties with a heart full of care. She had now the fatal conviction that by absenting herself on Thursday she had treated Durwold unkindly.

On Saturday they met. They walked together up and down the passage through the wood, Durwold with the most complete unconcern and Bessie in a condition of helpless acquiescence. Her stake was far greater that his.

"Oh, suppose Miss Agg were to meet us, or Mrs. Hope," she murmured.

"I have always found that it doesn't *do* to suppose things like that," he replied. "Do you eat chocolates?"

"Sometimes," she said.

"Have some out of this packet. Hold out your hands. No! More, more, more."

Their conversation, on this and other occasions, was of the most innocent description. He questioned her much about Mrs. Hope and Miss Agg and Miss Baker, and was vastly amused by all she told him. In return he talked to her about his life at school and at home, telling incredible things. She knew that he did not speak the truth, but he was always amusing. Their greatest difficulty was that Bessie had no information to take back to Mrs. Hope, and

in this respect she came very much into his hands. He supplied her with the necessary fictions. He gave her the descriptions of imaginary girls who had been seen afterwards to take the train for London; of boys who were untraceable because they had entered public houses and never emerged; and once a very shocking and circumstantial narrative about a boy who, spending all his half-holidays in the pains of special tuition, could prove a triumphant *alibi*. Durwold delighted extremely in concocting these stories. Bessie, too, after a while began to find them amusing, and it must be added that Mrs. Hope took the keenest pleasure in hearing them. And so, for a time, every one was pleased. But Durwold's unbridled sense of the ludicrous prevented his being a really safe collaborator, and it was bound eventually to occur to some one's mind that Bessie's information never led to convictions or executions. Bessie, therefore, had much cause for anxiety.

13

"This will be a busy morning," said Mrs. Hope. "We are going to start writing letters to the rich people in the correspondence list and ask them for help for the poor strikers at Denbury. My sister, Mrs. Trevanion, lives at Denbury. Her husband is the vicar. We ought to be very proud to do this work, because it is really for Miss Baker's sake. She is quite the leader of the strike and she thinks it is one of the most important things that have ever happened. The first letter will be one which you will enjoy writing because it is to a friend of yours. Address it to Sir Robert Wilton, Baronet, Orchard Wilton, Coulscombe, Somerset. Dear Sir Robert Wilton, I venture to write to you because it was through your information to the Duchess of Brackenbury that I heard of my present secretary, Miss Wake, who is giving me every satisfaction. I feel sure

you would be glad to have the opportunity of doing something to help the poor people of Denbury who are now engaged in a prolonged strike and are suffering great hardships. They are quite without food or coals or money, and with the advance of the cold weather their hardships will become greater and greater unless we can collect money to help them. I ought to say that the very greatest care will be used in spending the money and it will go to deserving cases only, as we have means of finding out all about each case of distress and Miss Baker has practically agreed to this policy. I am sure all who are happy and comfortable will like to have an opportunity of helping those who are in trouble. I remain, yours very sincerely."

14

"Now that is what I call a damn bad letter," said Bobby to his wife. "A, it is impertinent. B, it is silly. C, I don't care a tinker's curse whether the Denbury strikers starve or not. D, if I did give them money I should make a special point of giving it to those who deserve it least."

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, and Bobby was sitting astride a chair in his wife's bedroom, with his back to the fire, wearing a coat and trousers that were made of the same stuff as bath towels. Beside him was a low round table that held a teapot and cups and a number of letters already read and thrown aside. Lady Wilton, whose toilet was usually completed at an earlier hour than Bobby's, since it included neither a swim in the lake nor a gallop in the park, stood by the fire and told him to go away and dress and not to get angry with people two hundred miles away.

Here it will be convenient to state some facts about Bobby. About those who meet in London or stay at the same houses there is a floating mass of information, just complete enough to prevent mistakes in conversation. In

Bobby's case it was as follows. His family was an old one in Somerset, and had a Jacobean house of peculiar beauty at Coulscombe. He was the grandson of that Sir Francis Wilton who used to ask people to subscribe to funds for restoring churches. He was the son of that Major Wilton who was mortally wounded on the Indian frontier twenty years ago. His own record was less creditable. He had been a particularly naughty boy at Eton, and was involved in a silly case of breach of promise of marriage as an undergraduate at Oxford. After this his grandfather sent him into an office in London, on puritanic principles, and there he remained during the last few months of his grandfather's life. Since then he had lived at Coulscombe, hunting, shooting, looking after his property, and forming his opinions about men and things. In 1910, when he was twenty-six, he married the widow of Guy Rannard, the madman, who was five years older than himself. Meanwhile his respectability had carried him so far that he was the Conservative candidate for a division of Cornwall. He fought the two elections of 1910, but it was understood that he had not been a good candidate, and he had resigned the position. One merit he had. He was handsome; by those who rate the spirit above the flesh he would have been thought handsome in a supreme degree. He was slight, wiry, of no imposing height, and without any military smartness. But he had plenty of what is harder to breed for, an alert and easy gracefulness of movement or attitude. In colour he was dark, with a clear complexion and blue eyes. He was little troubled with the labour of shaving and altogether he looked younger than his years. His features were regular and fine, but here again the spirit was likely to attract more notice than the form. His point, to use the word used about animals, was a watchful adventurousness of expression. No one can be always on a stretch, and there were times when Bobby was moody, or reserved, or on his

dignity, or affectionate, or merely pugnacious, but the look of adventure, the look of watchfulness for adventure and for conflict, was never quite eclipsed. Quick and hot as he usually was, this gave his face a singular attractiveness.

Such was the man whom Marian Rannard had married after three years of widowhood and after the eight terrible months of her first marriage. She had no child by Rannard but had borne a son to Bobby in the month of July, 1911. Though she was good looking, and had brown hair that was really beautiful, it had been expected that Bobby's choice among women would have been some one a little less coldly serene. The serenity, however, was mostly on the surface. Also Bobby had his own tastes, and quite enough experience to justify a judgment. He was vastly proud of Marian, and happy with her, and loved her none the worse because he was the least bit in awe of her.

She stood looking over his shoulder at the letter poor Bessie had typewritten, at which Bobby still gazed with the strongest disapproval, and she said, "It is Uncle George's strike."

"Your Uncle George?" he asked.

"Yes. If it is at Denbury, it must be his. There 's no one else there, and I know his men have been out for months and months."

"Then what the devil does the woman mean by writing to me?" cried Bobby, now really angry. "'Pon my word, it 's simply insulting! It 's simply impertinent! I 'm to pay to have my own relations ruined! I never heard such——"

"Bobby, my angel, don't be so excited," said she. "The impertinent woman couldn't be expected to connect you with your uncle by marriage."

"Well, I suppose not," he agreed. "All the same, I call it a damn silly letter and damn bad form."

"How much will you send?" she asked gravely.

But he was not to be teased, and tore the letter into small pieces.

"It 's nice of you to be so fond of Uncle George," she told him, half caressing and half teasing, "because he 's not fond of you. It was he who called the house Chelsea Hospital."

"Well, it seems as if I can run Chelsea Hospital better than he runs Denbury," said Bobby, "when he can't even manage his own strike boys. If I had Joan Hopes and Miss Bakers getting up subscriptions for deserving cases here, 'pon my word, I 'd surprise them."

15

Nevertheless there was some reason for Uncle George's opinion. An extravagant old bachelor, drawing most of his income from a business where every man must work his hardest and his cheapest if the profits were to be really satisfactory, could not be expected to approve of the way in which the house and estate were managed at Orchard Wilton.

Luckily for himself, Bobby had few of the usual costly tastes. Except for his outlay on horses, hospitality, and his retinue of servants, he spent little on his own entertainment. He did not travel, seldom went to London, and had not the habit of buying things which he did not want. Nor had he to bear the cost of any improprieties, having sampled and abandoned these at a very tender age. Thus, even before his marriage, and in spite of the habits which caused his house to be compared with Chelsea Hospital, he had been able to live within his income. When Marian's five thousand a year was added, he was very comfortable indeed and began to save money for the younger children of whom he confidently expected a large battalion. But he could have saved nothing without Marian's contribution, and

he could not have borne the expense of his parliamentary candidature, nor of the wines and horses that he offered his guests, if he had not had some small resources beyond his property in land. This was the point taken by Uncle George, who held that he managed his land on sentimental lines and had no proper profit from it. Bobby did not agree. He contended that he managed his land as it had been managed by his grandfather, and, as he faithfully believed, by his grandfather's grandfather. And his grandfather, far from being sentimental, had been a very stern old man. It was true that Bobby had a gross rental of over six thousand a year from agricultural land, of which all but a small fraction went back into the land it came from. This he would have admitted. The net profits of the estate exactly paid for his household expenditure, his taxes, his shooting, and the strictly necessary equipment of his stable. Beyond this he never handled a shilling's worth of the money. He would have been rather shocked had he done so.

It amounted to a theory, and there are people who like theories, that the Wilton estate should contribute as much as would keep Bobby in comfort and splendour adequate to the fulfilment of his duties as a figurehead and landlord and land agent all in one. More than this it was not expected to do. It was not expected to provide him with a house in town or his wife with a pearl necklace. All the money that was over when Bobby was housed in suitable dignity at Orchard Wilton went back directly to the estate in whatever manner would best increase the amenity and productivity of the land from which all drew their living and for which Bobby was responsible to his own honour. He did not necessarily perform the functions of a charitable institution, for charity was little needed in his neighbourhood. But he did perform many of the functions of a Land Bank, taking no interest for his money, and some of the

functions of a Mayor and Corporation with the rates at their disposal. What more he did in the way of friendship and co-operation with his neighbours of all social degrees could never be estimated, but perhaps Uncle George would have condemned much of it as a waste of time.

It should be said that Bobby's practice as a landlord is far from being exceptional in the country districts of England. As the head of a household, however, he was really peculiar. He lived among an astonishing number of elderly women who took his wages in return for very little labour. There was his mother, to begin with, who was self-supporting but might have been expected to find a new home after Bobby married. There was his aunt Elizabeth Wilton who was in the same position. She was in his house at the present simply because she had been there in the past. So also were a miscellaneous collection of grey-headed parlour-maids and housemaids, and cooks and nurses and ladies' maids. Bobby's grandfather had never had men-servants in the house, and it happened at his death that a complete generation of elderly women was left for his heir to deal with. Under Bobby they remained as irremovable as the Bench of Judges. He would not have liked to miss a familiar face. He might have given them pensions and cottages, but instead of these he gave them assistant servants to do the work which they could no longer do for themselves. They kept the interest and dignity of their offices without the labour. On Bobby's part this was infinitely kind, but it was not good business.

Outside the house, there was every sign of the same situation coming about. Others have equalled Bobby's love of fine horses, but few can have equalled his love of grooms. It was a personal eccentricity that he liked to employ grooms where others employ clerks, secretaries, book-keepers, and even solicitors. As the manager of his own estate and of the affairs of the neighbourhood he needed a

staff of assistants, and he used his stablemen for the purpose. By imperceptible degrees they became his ambassadors from being merely his messengers, his accountants from being his clerks, and his advisers from being his servants. Out of half a dozen men and boys whose first duty was to keep his horses he formed what amounted to a Civil Service. It became also an unwritten rule that the sons of certain families had a right to embark on this enviable career, and shrewd economists like Uncle George could see that they would one day want to marry and would require additional wages to support their families. Such warnings addressed to Bobby met only with laughter, and Uncle George had relieved his feelings by talking of "Chelsea Hospital." Fortunately, however, Bobby was a richer man than Uncle George.

16

One morning about five weeks after he had read and destroyed the begging letter from Mrs. Hope, Bobby sat again at the same hour of the day in the same attire astride the same chair by the same table in the same room. He had drunk his tea and thrown aside his letters, was supremely happy, was smoking a cigarette, tilting back his chair towards the fire, and gazing contentedly at the ceiling. Marian was making bitter comments on the proofs of the baby's photographs which had just come by post.

"I can't see why you want to have that Organism photographed at all," said Bobby. "He is as ugly as sin and much best out of the way. Now this is what I propose. I 've three men to see this morning, one of them at Hartbridge, and I shall finish them off by half-past twelve. We 'll have an early lunch, before Chelsea Hospital assembles, and go off together to Newton in the dog-cart and buy Christmas presents. Trying to shop at Mrs. Doyle's is

simply hopeless. Then we 'll have tea at a shop and laugh at the people, and in the evening there 's the boxing class and I shall be knocked out by Tom Trevor in defiance of your social views. How will all that do?"

Before any answer could be given there was a knock at the door, and there entered a young man of soldierly appearance, dressed like a groom, who was Dick Trevor, brother to Tom, and Bobby's servant. He said that Mr. Stanborough wished to see Bobby at once.

"Where is he?"

"The library, sir."

"I 'll come," said Bobby. He lit one cigarette with the burning end of another and went without further delay to a place by the library fire. Mr. Stanborough was pacing the room in great agitation.

"My dear Uncle Stan, what is it?" Bobby asked. The title of "Uncle" was a fiction that dated from Bobby's babyhood.

"You haven't had any breakfast," he added, when the first question had dropped unanswered.

"No," said Mr. Stanborough, as though that mattered little.

Bobby tugged the bell rope, and watched the rector with great concern. "What 's wrong?" he asked.

"I have something most pitiful to tell you," said Mr. Stanborough, seeming to be utterly overcome with shame.

"My dear Uncle Stan, I 'm awfully sorry," said Bobby to fill the gap.

"Bessie Wake!" said Mr. Stanborough.

"What, dead?" asked Bobby in distress.

"No. Gone astray! Ruined!"

There was a sudden stirring of the dark temper which had brought Bobby into many troubles.

"Who by?" he asked.

"This is the story," said Mr. Stanborough, sitting down,

and spreading out his hands in a sort of fixed gesture of despair, "this is the story. I was calling at the Wakes, in the ordinary way, on Tuesday last. They told me that Bessie had not written for three weeks. It had been her habit to write every Sunday and Wednesday. Mrs. Wake explained that she had then written to Mrs. Hope, the woman who employed Bessie, to ask if she was well. There was no reply. Consequently, when I reached home I wrote to Mrs. Hope myself. I have the most astonishing answer. A most discourteous answer, though I do not wish that to signify. But the news! It is really frightful. The woman writes that Bessie is a bad girl and has lived a life of shame under her roof and has now left her service. That is all. What can we do? Consider the feelings of the Wakes. Think of the scandal in the village! And Bessie herself!"

"It is a lie," said Bobby.

"How is it possible?" said the old man. "I have wondered, but who would tell a lie of such a character? The woman is a clergyman's wife."

"Uncle Stan, look here," said Bobby. "This is what we will do. We will send for Marian and you shall tell her what you have told me and we will see what she says. She will say what I say. You mustn't worry yourself about such nonsense. The thing 's simply ridiculous. It 's just some bit of blasted vindictiveness on the part of Mrs. Hope, who 's capable of anything. That woman wrote me a letter the other day, which——"

"But I have heard of similar cases," said Mr. Stanborough most wretchedly. "And I would rather *not* discuss it with Marian, Bobby, much rather not. I ask myself what are we to do. The difficulty of tracing a girl in London if—if——"

"What you will do is to sit tight and leave it to me," Bobby answered. "I shall go to Maryhill to-day, at once,

and don't you fear I won't see it through. Tell nobody, Uncle Stan, and don't go about looking like Rachel weeping for her children, or half the women in the village will guess everything in two minutes. We 'll have a cipher code, if you like, and I 'll telegraph to you every half-hour. Seriously, Uncle Stan, leave it to me and don't be worried. I 'll go up to town and put it all right. I feel absolutely cocksure it 's not as bad as you think."

Dick Trevor entered presently with a breakfast tray, and the topic was suspended. But the case of Bessie Wake had been advanced. It had been handed over to the civil arm.

17

Bobby's attitude towards these matters needs a word of explanation. He did not really take the light-hearted view that he had in kindness set before Mr. Stanborough. Marian had to hold his hands many times that morning and plead with him to avoid rash and foolish actions when he should come to grips with Mrs. Hope. He was intensely angry, nor is it hard to show the reason. He was the head of a house which could be called contemptuously Chelsea Hospital. He was much the same in his quality of landlord. But if his hobby was to be generous in these respects it was also his hobby to maintain the rights of his position. He considered that Mrs. Hope had infringed these rights outrageously. Suppose Bessie to be guilty, it was monstrous that he had not been informed of her punishment. Suppose her to be innocent, then the slander and cruelty to her were an attack on the honour of one standing in his position towards herself and her family. He was touched in the region of his authority, in fact, which was a tender spot. The wrong done to the girl, the wrong done to her parents, were obscured by the insufferable insult to himself.

Everything was abandoned; the business, the shopping,

and the boxing. One of the boys drove him into Newton Royal, wondering at his silence, for he talked copiously with his servants as a rule about all that concerned them and much that concerned himself. He had a bag with necessaries for one or two nights. His train left at noon and he was in no better temper when he reached Paddington.

He took his bag with him to Maryhill. At the station he inquired about hotels, and was sent to the Southwick Arms. There he left his bag, and drove on in his cab to The Arches.

He was taken to the drawing-room, a pretty fantastic-shaped depository of uninteresting photographs and cushions and silk bows and china ornaments and wicker chairs and religious pictures and volumes of the poets, with a grand piano filling a good proportion of the space. But Bobby noticed none of these things. He paced up and down in the midst of them, nursing the grievance of a feudal lord. Then, holding his card in her hand, demure and pretty and ready as usual to be slightly shocked, Mrs. Hope joined him.

18

Mrs. Hope seldom really smiled, except at the poor, but her tone was quite friendly as she asked Bobby to sit down. They sat in wicker arm-chairs on either side of the fire.

"I am Sir Robert Wilton," said Bobby, bluntly. "I think you employ a secretary, Bessie Wake, who comes from my village."

"I *did*," said Mrs. Hope with an adequate inflection of reproach.

"Well, first of all," he said, "I want to ask you where she is."

Poor Mrs. Hope fell headlong into the wrong supposition. Accustomed, as she was, always to connect gracefulness with levity and vitality with vice, such a question

from such a person about such a girl could only have one meaning for her.

"I think I ought to ask your reason for wishing to know," she replied, speaking as though it were very painful to say such a thing. If anger be painful, it certainly pained Bobby to hear it, though he had no notion of the real point of the insult.

"You ask me what are my reasons for wishing to know what has become of Bessie Wake?" he asked.

"I think I ought to know," said she.

"But I told you, she comes from my village. I thought you knew all about it."

"I suppose you are her landlord."

"I am her father's landlord," said Bobby, who was puzzled by this turn of the conversation.

"Well, I think I should tell you," said Mrs. Hope, "that I did know that you were her landlord, because I heard your name from the Duchess of Brackenbury's secretary, and the girl used to talk of you herself, but I think I ought to ask your reasons for wishing to know where she is."

" 'Pon my word," said Bobby, "I don't know what to say. I don't think you understand. She,—she 's one of my own people."

"I 'm afraid I certainly don't understand at all," said Mrs. Hope. "I never heard of landlords having rights of this kind. Of course I am still responsible for the girl and it is really my duty to——"

" *You* responsible for her!" cried Bobby.

"Well, surely," she answered, being still perfectly civil and pleasant in her manner. "She was in this house for several weeks and it was we who made the discoveries about her."

"I know she was in this house for several weeks," he replied. "But you don't seem to understand that she has been on my land for several hundred years. I don't know

about being responsible, but if I haven't got a right to know where she is I don't know who has."

"Surely those who are responsible for her," said Mrs. Hope in tones of sweet reason.

"What did she do?" Bobby asked.

"I am quite willing to tell you what she did," Mrs. Hope replied, "although it is a very distressing story and of course we ought to hope it will go no further. She took to having meetings with the Maryhill schoolboys after dark. I think, perhaps, now, we ought to be able to see what a terrible thing it is for girls to be brought up in bad ways. Bessie Wake was discovered having meetings with the schoolboys after dark and in her letter-case we found letters which made it all quite certain. And it was particularly wrong of her for this reason: we had employed her in the work of watching the lanes and passages where the boys meet some of the town girls, so she was specially on her honour not to become mixed up with the boys herself. That was what made it such a very bad case. She was sent there to see that the meetings did not occur and instead of that she had meetings herself. She was caught in the very act and we found the letters to prove it. And what makes it even worse is that she used to come back to me and tell me what were really lies about things she pretended she had seen, while all the time she was really having meetings with the boys herself."

"I see," said Bobby, whose interest in the subject was broadening. "If you have got these letters, I should like to see them."

"Certainly you shall," said Mrs. Hope. She left the room and returned presently with the letters, after an interval which Bobby had spent in thinking that this was a case where one ought to be very cool and cunning.

The letters numbered seven. Bobby read them. He saw that there was a coincidence in that they were written

by Eddie Durwold whom he had met in the house of his friend Yardale. But that signified nothing at present.

"They are all from one boy," he remarked.

"Yes," she said.

"And there isn't much harm in them. Or rather, there isn't any," he continued.

"That would be a matter of opinion, wouldn't it?" she answered.

"They aren't even love letters."

There was no reply.

"They just arrange meetings and make jokes."

Silence again.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that because of this you turned that girl out upon the streets?"

"Oh, no indeed," said Mrs. Hope; "if you wish to know about it, I can assure you we have sent her to the best possible home for her. Everything was done. All my friends were kindness itself and the girl has gone to a home where I am sure she ought to have every chance of learning better. We took all responsibility, indeed."

Bobby went red, but controlled his voice.

"I suppose you mean that you sent her to some place for prostitutes," he said.

It was Mrs. Hope, at this point, who reddened.

"Oh, no indeed," she said. "We were able to find a home for girls who have fallen, as she has, but are not really past hope. We were able to do it through the Preventive Rescue Society. She went quite obediently of her own accord."

"When you wrote to Mr. Stanborough," he replied, "you said that she had been leading a life of shame."

For the first time in the conversation Mrs. Hope showed faint symptoms of disquiet.

"Of course, we don't know how far it really went," she answered, "but surely it was a life of shame. Why, think of the lies she told me, Sir Robert, at the very time when

she was having meetings with that boy. She said that she had seen a tall boy with red hair and a scar on his cheek, and so on, and that he had met a woman from London, and so on, and there was not one word of truth in it. It was not only once but again and again. She was with Durwold all the time."

"I see," said Bobby.

"And think of the work she was employed upon," said Mrs. Hope, with a new access of confidence in her cause; "it was her special duty to watch the boys and girls and bring back information for the purity movement, and instead of that she was with Durwold. And what made it worse was that we always trusted her absolutely, and she knew we trusted her, yet she could come home and tell me all those lies. Without a blush she used to tell them. She used to fabricate information."

"I see," said Bobby. "I wonder if you have ever heard of an Act of Parliament called the Slander of Women Act, Mrs. Hope?"

"No, never," she replied, "but I am sure this has nothing to do with Acts of Parliament. We all acted for the best and what we did was certainly the right thing for the girl's good."

"I don't know much about it myself," Bobby replied. "But my lawyers will tell me all about it and I believe it would get you into trouble, Mrs. Hope, for saying that Bessie led a life of shame. Now please have the goodness to tell me where she is or I will loose my lawyers upon you like terriers on a rat."

It was not so much the threat as the simile which offended Mrs. Hope. She was able, however, to give a very excellent reply.

"I don't think I could do so without hearing your reasons for wishing to know," she said, "and indeed I do not really know where the place is myself. It was all arranged

through my friend Miss Agg, who was kindness itself, and I was very busy with the Denbury strike, as indeed I still am. So even if I wished to, I could not tell you where to find the girl, and I think you would really find it very little use to go to Miss Agg, because I feel sure she would give no information. But I can honestly promise you that the girl is in the very best hands, and there need be no anxiety, so far as is possible, of course——"

"Does Miss Agg live in Maryhill?" asked Bobby

"Oh yes," said she.

"Thank you," he answered; "then in that case I will say good-night."

He walked out without offering to shake hands. What was curious was that it was only his code as a gentleman, a thing which Mrs. Hope thought almost wicked, which forbade him to say things that would have caused her the greatest pain. She followed to see that he had closed the front door. There were letters in the letter-box, and one was in the admired handwriting of Miss Baker.

"Dear Joan," it ran, "kindly write immediately all your information about Sir Robert Wilton. You said you had corresponded, and here we know nothing. Mr. Deane has had a stroke and it is said that the whole Denbury property will go on his death to his niece who is married to this Wilton. Time may intervene, but may not. This woman may become the arch enemy at any minute. Write at once."

19

Bobby, also, wrote a letter. It was written at the Southwick Arms and addressed to his wife.

"I am in such a temper," he wrote, "that I don't know what I am writing. I have seen hag Hope and called on hag Agg, who wasn't in. They have sent Bessie to a place for prostitutes because she had half a dozen pointless

letters from a young cousin of Yardale's who is in the school here. Silly little fool to write at all. I hope they beat him to a jelly. But I was honestly and truly as good as gold with Mrs. Hope, and said nothing except that she was like a rat. Before they sent Bessie to a reformatory they tried to turn her into a t'other-way-round what-do-you-call-it, a spy on hedgerow lovers. I think Wake would cut his throat if he knew about this. Wire me at once the name of the solicitor you had when we were married. I won't go to the fellow I had in my breach of promise, and Fatty at Newton is too far off. I have an instinctive premonition that it 's Habeas Corpus. Damn the law and the lawyers. The point is that they won't tell me where the home is where they have sent her. I simply must stay till I have seen it through. I was angry about myself and us, but now I am angry because of poor old Wake as well. The woman at this inn has a virtuous countenance, so you can be sure my bed is aired. If you insist you can give that little Organism a flick from me, and tell him if he ever writes letters to a girl, all signed and dated, I 'll flog him Prussian blue. Your own BOBBY."

20

There was an interview with Miss Agg next morning. One sample will suffice.

"If only you could understand," she said, while her excellent square teeth stood out in the forefront of a plain hard-working face, "the difficulty we have in finding the right institution for each case that comes, and the anxieties, and how hard it is to know what to do for the best, and how ungrateful and inconsiderate many people are, and what a quantity of things we have on our hands, and how hard it is to do the right thing for every one, I really think, I do indeed, that you would leave the matter in our hands. If

this girl's parents choose to interfere I suppose we shall be compelled to say where she is. But tell a stranger—that we cannot do, for reasons any one could see; it really can't be done, however great an interest you may take in the case."

So Bobby went to London and saw the lawyer who had found favour at the time of the marriage. He told the facts of the matter as fairly as he could, and then listened to an exposition of the law of Habeas Corpus. The more he heard the less he liked it. From the earliest dawn of his intelligence he had been averse from the lawful way of doing anything which could be done unlawfully; very inconsistent he was, for he expected others to be most correct when his own authority was in question. Finally it was arranged by a fiction, legal or otherwise, that Mr. Wake was to be set up as the prime mover in the matter, with Bobby as an intermediary who kindly employed legal aid on his behalf. The lawyer then wrote a letter to Miss Agg to demand, on the part of the girl's father, that her whereabout should be disclosed. The letter was sent by the hand of a clerk, and the dovecots of Maryhill were fluttered woefully that afternoon.

As was to be expected, Bobby took the lawyer out to luncheon and treated him as nicely as if he had been a groom or a boxing-master or a *locum tenens* at the rectory, asked him to visit Coulscombe, to shoot, to spend Christmas, and much else that the lawyer thought peculiar.

The arrangement was that Bobby was to return to Maryhill and wait at the Southwick Arms till the clerk brought Miss Agg's answer to the letter. This he did, but he tired of the Southwick Arms. He walked out into the street, and strolled in at the boys' entrance of Mr. Robinson's house. The boys had just come back from football.

"Can you tell me which is Durwold's room?" he asked of the first boy he saw. He was amiably answered and taken

upstairs and along a passage. Entering the room indicated he found his culprit kicking off his football boots beside a bath in a diminutive room littered with books and rubbish of every description.

"Why, it 's Sir—Sir Bobby Wilton," cried Durwold with delight.

"Yes, it is," he answered, " and I want to know what the hell you mean by having intrigues with my farmers' daughters."

"Your farmers' daughters!" said Durwold. "Oh! Oh! my goodness! I *am* sorry. You mean Bessie Wake, I suppose."

"Yes, Bessie Wake."

Durwold looked extremely distressed. He stood up and put his hands in his pockets and faced Bobby with an air of unqualified contrition.

"I never had the least idea it had anything to do with *you*," he said. "She never mentioned your name. I didn't even know where she came from. I simply found her walking about by the churchyard, and now I come to think of it it was really *she* who found *me*. Besides, I give you my word of honour there was absolutely——"

"Oh, never mind about that," said Bobby. "But I 'd be obliged if you 'd not choose my farmers' daughters to make your friends of. There has been hell to pay."

"Oh, has there really?" asked Durwold with much concern. "Well I *am* sorry. To tell you the truth, after the row I became severed from my base of communications, or intelligence department, or whatever you would call it in such a case, and so I never heard any more."

"Well, the girl 's in a reformatory," said Bobby, "and as far as I can see it will need half the bench of judges to get her out alive. If you play me a trick like this again I 'll break every bone in your body. And what an ass you were to write those letters!"

"Yes, I find that 's the view that nearly everybody takes," the boy answered. "But what a pity about Bessie! I really am sorry. I *am* sorry. Who 'd have thought that such a simple thing would end in such a combustiamento! You won't believe it but I really am very sorry indeed."

"The point is this," said Bobby. "I don't intend the whole story to get round the village at home. I don't intend even the girl's father and mother to hear of it. Now if the infernal lawyers have their way there will be no keeping it dark. So I have made up my mind that as soon as I can find out where the place is, where they 've sent her, I shall go and get her out myself. And it 's beginning to dawn on me that the people of the place are likely to make a fuss before I can manage it. I shall send for one fellow from home who can be trusted not to talk, and I shall want another fellow and I think the other fellow might be you."

"When will it happen?" the boy asked.

"To-morrow, perhaps," said Bobby.

"I should simply love it," Durwold answered, "but I am afraid my temporary absence would cause the greatest pain to the authorities of this school."

"When I was your age I shouldn't have let that worry me," said Bobby, with perfect historical accuracy.

Durwold reflected that his reputation for courage would henceforth be at Bobby's mercy, and, for all his conversational affectations, it was a reputation that he valued. "Since you put it so charmingly," he replied, "I suppose I must say Yes."

This monstrous arrangement was cheerfully described in the evening letter to Lady Wilton, who laboured hard to compose a telegram which should set forth the iniquity of thus employing Durwold yet should convey no meaning at all to the post-offices at Coulscombe and Maryhill.

21

"Miss Agg acknowledges the receipt of Mr. Baldwin's communication. She is given to understand by her own legal advisers that Mr. Baldwin has a technical right to the information he requests. Miss Agg states that the girl Elizabeth Wake is in the charge of Miss Penley at the Limes, Pikes End, near Wootonhampstead.

"Miss Agg earnestly begs and prays that no attempt may be made to remove the girl from the establishment, which is most admirably suited to cases of her sort. Miss Agg has wished to be a true friend to the girl, and is still ready to engage herself to find a suitable refuge for the girl in the future when she passes out of the establishment."

Miss Agg must have kept her legal advisers very close at hand, for the above letter was brought to Bobby at the Southwick Arms before five o'clock on the day of his interview with the lawyer in London. The lawyer's clerk gave it to him to read. He wrote down the name of the place and person sheltering Bessie Wake. He turned to the study of the map of England as soon as he was left alone. He had never heard of Wootonhampstead. To his great satisfaction, however, it proved to be not twenty miles across country from Maryhill. A telegram would bring Dick Trevor by noon to-morrow; a motor could be hired, and the rescue party could set forth at whatever hour might best suit the particular lie by which Durwold would doubtless seek to save his skin. The telegram was sent at once and the car was hired without difficulty.

Bobby was so little in touch with civilisation that it never occurred to him to go and spend his evening in London. He stayed at Maryhill, bought novels, and fell into sad weariness in his room at the inn. He asked Durwold to come and dine with him, but this was not allowed.

Nevertheless he had a consolation. He thought, in his ignorance, that the adventure to-morrow would be enjoyable.

It proved to be quite the reverse. When they left the establishment near Wootonhampstead at five o'clock the next day, all of them were in a sad state. Bessie had not ceased to weep since first, in the middle of a sewing class, with an agony of shame, she had seen Sir Robert Wilton enter the room. Dick Trevor was exhausted by the strain of keeping her calm while he helped her to pack her boxes. Durwold was disappointed because the whole affair had not come up to his expectations, and Bobby, for the same reason, was something more than disappointed. For the first time in the history of the matter he had been confronted by a woman who was clearly in the right. He had explained, he had apologised, he had blushed scarlet, but it had not been a pleasant business. It had been inevitable that Miss Penley should take the words of the Aggs and Hopes in preference to his. It was evident, also, that the Aggs and Hopes had made the most of Bessie's indiscretion. The rescue had been unpleasant, and Bobby did not feel more kindly disposed towards the Aggs and Hopes and Bakers who had brought him to this.

Durwold was sent back at once in the car, which Dick drove, and Dick was to bring Bobby's bag from Maryhill to the Paddington Hotel. Bobby himself, with Bessie, went to London by train. It was odd that Bobby, who in some ways was a business man, prompt in answering letters and paying bills and repairing his cottages, had never for a moment thought what he intended to do with Bessie when the rescue was effected. So serenely sure was he that all circumstances would dance to the convenience of his authority. But now, while they waited for the train, he began to be perplexed.

He was kind to her. He commented severely on her

folly in not having told him of her trouble, but assured her that the worst that would ever be charged against her was the offence of lying to Mrs. Hope who was enough to tempt lies out of an angel. No one on earth should ever know what had happened. Presently, when it could be accounted for, she should come back to her father and mother. But it was his will and pleasure that she should stop crying, and be sensible.

Then he turned to his own problems. What could he do with her? An immediate return to Coulscombe would excite comment and lead to a discovery of the truth, or of something much worse than the truth. She must stay in London. Yet to take her with him to the Paddington Hotel for the night was out of the question. From the very moment of their arrival at St. Pancras a difficulty would arise. He must take her somewhere, and to a place where it would be right to take and leave her. He could think of no relatives or intimate friends who would be in London at this time. Burdened with the silly memories of his performances at Oxford, he could not so much as give the girl a meal at a restaurant without being unfair to Marian for she was not dressed or naturally moulded to pass for a proper companion for himself. He knew that there were homes. He knew of the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Girls' Friendly Society. But it was likely, he thought, that these were controlled by replicas of Mrs. Hope and Miss Agg. If he left Bessie with them, he might find in the morning that the gates of Newgate had closed upon her. And he knew of no lodging-house or boarding-house where he could put her. He was perplexed beyond measure until he remembered the one place where he was sure of finding friends. He remembered the House of Commons.

So he took her in a cab to the House of Commons. They passed through Westminster Hall into the corridor, and he

left her sitting among ladies who had come to dine with members. He penetrated to that hall which is peopled by those whose desire is to find places in the gallery of the House and hear that which is commonly duller than most sermons for the sake of seeing those whom the press has made more interesting than most preachers. He sent in a card to the Marquis of Clontarf, and he waited for the usual period. It was a longer wait than he cared for. He returned to see how Bessie was faring, only to find her relapsed into distress.

"Oh, sir," she whispered, "I have seen Miss Baker."

"Miss Baker?"

"Miss Baker, a friend of Mrs. Hope, sir, who took me on the inspecting. She walked through."

"Are these women everywhere?" thought Bobby. "Then if she comes again and finds you," he said, "mind this. You be the first to call the police. Don't let her call them first. You call first. Say you are the daughter of one of my tenants and that I am here. Don't let her be the first to call the police. You call first. Don't let her be the first."

He went back, much irritated, and ran straight into Clontarf. "Thank goodness you're here," he cried. "My dear Paddy, I 'm in such a fix. I must have advice at once. Where can we go? I 've fallen into the hands of the most pernicious crew of evil-minded damned infernal harpies that ever were. I used to think I knew about women, but behold the half had not been told me. They 're like an ant heap, like lice under a bit of wood——"

"Let 's sit down here while you tell me all about it," Clontarf suggested, while they walked along the corridor. Clontarf now represented a great industrial constituency in the midlands, and he had changed in many respects since his undergraduate days when Bobby had first known him. But he had the qualities that make a good friend in need.

"I have this one suggestion," he said, when he had heard

all. "I can send the girl to a boarding-house which is kept by one of our old housemaids, in South Kensington, and I will write a letter to tell her all about it. The girl will be absolutely all right there, and you can leave her there as long as you like, till you want to send for her. What I can promise is that she would be absolutely safe and sound there. If you like, I 'll write the letter now and send the girl along with my secretary in a cab. How will that do? And then you 'll stop and have dinner with me."

Bobby's gratitude was beyond what can be printed. His mind was relieved of an oppression, and his eloquence soared upward in flights of rustic gratitude. When the deed of charity was done, and they sat down to dinner, he was in very good spirits.

§2

"Now what is it to-night?" he asked. "I 'll tell you, Paddy. The Agricultural Labourers Carbolic Spray Bill; the Make 'em all Brush their Teeth Bill; the Under Kitchen-Maids Toenails Bill; the Get 'em all Soaked in Boracic Bill. Which is it? What are you making the poor beggars do to-night?"

"Making the landlord pay a super-tax of forty shillings in the pound," said Clontarf.

"Don't rag," Bobby answered. "You 're just as bad as any of them. You 're making some new law to set the police on my poor boys; now aren't you? 'Pon my word, you ought to be grateful to get first-hand information. One of the Newton porters told me he' d seen an article in the *Morning Post* about the freedom of life in Russia and he thought of sending his second son there if I 'll pay to have him taught the language. He picked the paper up in the Cornish Express. Now, Paddy, honestly, aren't you bringing in a Bill to stop my old woman selling squibs

on Guy Fawkes Day, or to make my hedgers have their hair inspected by the District Council on Good Friday,—all highly moral and purely democratic,—now aren't you, honestly?

"Dozens," said Clontarf with enthusiasm.

"You 're as bad as any Rad," Bobby continued. "You 're as progressive and democratic as any one. You 'll make my carters have new wheels or make my keeper turn his boys out of their jobs, or something of that sort. You 've got a little Bill of your own to put the police on *somebody*, now haven't you? You must have, or what do the Rads pay you for?"

"Have some more to drink and don't be so clever," said Clontarf, grinning imperturbably.

"But this is important," Bobby declared. "I can tell you my fellows have jolly well had enough of it. I tell you what it is. It all boils down to the policeman; democracy and reform and socialism and all, all down to the policeman. And don't you imagine they like it. 'Pon my word, a fellow was fined for saying Damn. Why the devil don't you make the country ring with it? But all you do is to send the constable to cure the fellow of consumption which he hasn't got. My word, Paddy, if you knew how they hate it!"

23

There stood near them as they dined a tall grave-faced man with a bald head and an iron-grey moustache, a man who had the air of a superior shop foreman. He waited for his opportunity and asked Clontarf if he might speak to him. They withdrew together. In a moment Clontarf returned.

"I 'm afraid this will be a great shock to your feelings," he said, "but that man is Hopkinson, who sits for South

Herts, and he wants you to come and attend a conference on the strike at Denbury. Jimmy Russell saw you here, and told Hopkinson, and Hopkinson has got Miss Baker and a couple of Labour Members conferring somewhere. I 'd no idea you 'd blossomed into a Captain of Industry."

"But Denbury has nothing to do with *me*," said Bobby. "That all belongs to my wife's Uncle George!"

"Then I 'm afraid it 's Uncle George who has died," Clontarf replied. "And it has everything to do with you now, because Marian is his heir and you and she are his executors."

"The devil!" said Bobby.

Clontarf, still bending over him, began to grin rather unkindly, while Mr. Hopkinson waited in the distance, looking appropriately solemn.

"Hopkinson is a Unionist," Clontarf said, "and Miss Baker is the woman who runs the strike and collects the money to keep it going. Hopkinson is the dove of peace. He 's one of the progressive Tories whom you love so much. What shall I tell them? Will you come and see them, or would you rather not?"

"Confusion!" said Bobby. "What ought I to do?"

"Well, you ought really to see them."

"Will you come too?"

"All right."

"Miss Baker!" Bobby exclaimed, as the name recurred to him. "Miss Baker! The devil! She 's the woman who catches the bad boys of Maryhill!"

Clontarf had left him, to take the message to Mr. Hopkinson. It was truly a crisis. How scornfully Bobby had thought of Uncle George who could not keep his own paid servants in order! And now he was to confer on Uncle George's affairs with three members of Parliament and one of these women of the times! He was not used to conferences. He had once been invited to confer with the editor

of a local newspaper, but he sent a groom with a whip to confer on his behalf.

Clontarf returned and allowed him a few more moments for his dinner. He offered him varieties of alcohol to brace him for the battle. But Bobby would have none of these. It was no time for trifling. He was coming rapidly to that state of suspiciousness which besets country people who discuss business with the clever folk in towns. He was certainly not going to make any sentimental promises on Marian's behalf, he said, not for all the peacemakers in the world. Never was such a mixture of schoolboy nervousness with the show of resolution.

"All you need do is to keep calm," said the wise Clontarf, "and listen to what they say, and you won't be asked to promise anything to-night. You remember to keep calm."

"I won't sit and be lectured," Bobby declared.

"Of course you won't. You 'll just listen to what they say and tell them you 'll think it over. Then you can go home and tell Marian and decide what you will do. You keep calm and cool, Bobby."

They left the table, and Clontarf led Bobby upstairs to a committee room, a large gaunt place that was disagreeably reminiscent of some of the newer form rooms at school. It was in a state of disorder, with pens and papers tossed on the tables and the chairs standing about as their late occupants had left them. In one corner a little group of people, three men and a woman, were sitting round a small table which a placard advertised to be the preserve of newspaper reporters. Clontarf led Bobby in this direction, and the next instant sufficed to annihilate all hope of a union of hearts on this occasion. "Bobby, may I introduce Mr. Hopkinson," said Clontarf. "Miss Baker, Sir Robert Wilton," said Mr. Hopkinson, after shaking hands.

Some faces, once they are seen, can never be forgotten.

Miss Baker's massive head, broad and lowering brow, and discontented mouth, were registered in Bobby's mind for ever as those of the Voluntary Inspector whom his boys mishandled three years ago. He knew her in an instant, and he, arrogant and domineering as she thought him, was as quickly recognised by her. In his rough and muddy clothes she had taken him on that former occasion for the son of a gentleman farmer, or a farmer's pupil, and it had not crossed her mind that the husband of the widowed niece of Mr. Deane could be he. She was not displeased. A trace of colour came into her pale cheeks. Her eyes met Bobby's full and straight, and to those who knew the signs of Bobby's face it was quite certain that the poor people of Denbury would get no concessions this night. Then Messrs. Ackerly and Hunk, the Labour Members, were introduced. All sat down, except Mr. Hopkinson, who preferred to address Bobby with the advantage of a man upon his feet.

Whatever credit Mr. Hopkinson stood to gain by settling the strike, he was deeply in earnest. He had evidently been warned that it was necessary to impress Bobby with his own staunch Conservatism. He did this at length. But he adroitly advanced to the next natural stage of the argument, which was to the effect that a Conservative is the working man's true friend. Then, with a pleasing tumble from high altitudes into personal pique, he explained that the late Mr. Deane had really been a most cantankerous old man. You could not write him the most moderate letter without getting the rudest reply imaginable. There was no dealing with him. And there was no serious doubt that he had sweated his Denbury hands disgracefully, as a very few examples would suffice to show.

Mr. Hopkinson gave these few examples after reference to the papers lying before him. Every paper he used, he afterwards handed to Bobby, who looked at it perfunctorily

and put it down on the table in front of him: and this might have continued until midnight without the issue being changed. Bobby's mind was made up.

"And do you want me to go through these papers now?" he said, when Mr. Hopkinson sat down.

"It is as you like, Sir Robert," said Mr. Hopkinson. "The object of this conference is, I take it, to show from the first that there is no animosity, and that the proceedings between you and this lady are to be carried on in a spirit of frank and friendly discussion. At least, for my part, that is my sole and only object."

"That is very gratifying," Bobby answered. "I shall be able to tell that to my wife. This something glaze business—uncrackable glaze—what I gather is that the wages have been too low and the hours too long, and some other things, and my wife has come into the position of employer. Well, if you ask me, I expect she 'll decide the whole thing for herself."

It was pointed out to him, with due delicacy, that his influence might weigh with his wife, and that the position was so critical that his office of executor gave him a voice in the negotiations.

"Might we ask if Lady Wilton is in London?" said Mr. Hopkinson.

"She 's at home," he replied. "At Coulscombe."

"Is it likely she will be in town soon?" Mr. Hopkinson asked. "To-morrow perhaps? Or the day after?"

"Very unlikely indeed," said Bobby.

"Then perhaps," said Mr. Hopkinson with more than the prudence of Solomon, "Miss Baker would go and see Lady Wilton at Coulscombe."

There were deep murmurings of approval from the two Labour men, one wizened and neurotic, the other fat and fleshy, who had as yet done nothing except look very dubious as to the wisdom of their presence here at all. The sug-

gested journey to Coulscombe did certainly seem to meet the case with excellent precision.

"And perhaps I may be told, first," said Bobby, coolly, but with rising colour, "what Miss Baker has got to do with this at all."

"Miss Baker?" exclaimed Mr. Hopkinson, with a shocked look at Bobby over the rims of his glasses.

"Yes."

"Surely I explained that Miss Baker is a lady who has associated herself with the Denbury strike and has the advantage of knowing all the particulars better than any of us."

Bobby had been playing with a quill pen. He put it down. He sat upright in his chair. He had ceased to have any fear of being cheated by the clever folk in town.

"These men at Denbury are now my wife's workpeople," he observed.

"Certainly," said Mr. Hopkinson.

"Then what has Miss Baker got to do with it?"

"I explained to you that she understands their case and represents them."

"I suppose it 's Miss Baker who has been good enough to start this agitation."

"Yes, I have explained——"

"And to attack my wife's uncle who has just died."

"Inevitably," said Mr. Hopkinson.

"And to ruin the value of the property my wife inherits."

"To depreciate it, undoubtedly, for the time being."

"And my wife is not to manage her own affairs without Miss Baker's leave."

"Sir Robert, this attitude is most unwise."

"Then all I can say," said Bobby, "is that I 'll be shot if I 'll have anything to do with it, and I don't thank you for bringing me here. For all I care about the strikers at Denbury they can starve themselves stiff. And when

they 're tired of that, they can come to me and say so without help from Miss Baker. It 's simply impertinent to say these things to me. I won't listen to another word."

He pushed back his chair, and the conference was ended. Though Mr. Hopkinson besought him, he would not listen. He rose, and stood for a moment rather foolishly looking about to see if he had brought a hat. In his face was the high colour that came so readily under provocation. Then Clontarf led him away, and had the sense to laugh a great deal and chaff him upon his behaviour. But Bobby was too much upset even to tell him the tale of the Voluntary Inspector.

24

"Astonishing!" said Mr. Hopkinson, when Bobby and Clontarf had gone. "What astonishing behaviour! If this were a more important strike such an attitude would not be allowed."

"Don't you worry," said Miss Baker. "He will soon learn that a settlement of the strike will be good for his bank balance, and then there 'll be a change."

So she said, but she did not believe it. She was much too good a judge of character.

"It seems incredible that his wife should behave in the same way," said Mr. Hopkinson.

"Oh, no, it 's not," Miss Baker replied.

"You will go to Coulscombe, I suppose?"

"No."

"Whatever will you do, then?"

"I shall go to Denbury. That 's the place for me. If you want my apologies for bringing you all here on this wild-goose chase, you can all have them, I 'm sure. I shall leave by the ten-fifteen. The vicarage address will find me. Things must be left to develop themselves. Good-night."

Mr. Hopkinson took her out to a cab, and gave the cabman, as she desired him, the address of her flat.

At this date the Denbury strike was to Miss Baker as a child, a pet dog, or an infatuation. Except in some moody hours of indifference it absorbed her entire interest. But there had been one drawback to her pleasure. The late Mr. Deane had lived at Biarritz, and had never taken the smallest notice of anything she had done to him or said of him. This made him a very unsatisfying antagonist. She had never once had the chance of seeing him wince. She had never been able to bring home to him what it meant to incur the just hatred of the people, or, a far worse thing, her personal hostility. He had not even afforded her the satisfaction of an action for libel.

How different it was now! The new antagonist was worthy of her steel, a foe whom she could personally hate. Miss Baker had an appreciation of the difference between man and man. In the old days when she engaged regularly in her strange sport at Maryhill she had known the kind of schoolboy whom it most pleased her to trap into trouble. A dash of swagger, for instance, provoked her antipathy and made it sweet to her to work for the humbling of him that swaggered. A look of mischief, a merry eye, good looks, robust health, muscular strength, roused her in the same way. She was the enemy of those who had an air of command, or the appearance of unearned prosperity, or the signs of an inherited excellence of body or mind or breeding. She was a Socialist, the friend of the poor and suffering, and so it might be said that she hated those who were farthest removed from the objects of her own care. Or, as a person of ordinary temper, it might be said that she disliked those who would be most inclined to dislike her. Or in wounded vanity, jealousy, and unsatisfied desires, there was a deeper reason. Certain it was that the thought of crushing Bobby was sweeter than the thought of crushing Mr. Deane. Mr.

Deane had been obnoxious to her political principles, but Bobby was obnoxious to her very heart, nor was there in the world another creature whom she would have liked better to bend across the stone of slaughter and sacrifice to her unhappy gods.

Driving from the House of Commons to her flat in Marylebone, Miss Baker became positively excited. She thought of Bobby, and his words and looks, and scornfully wondered if his wife adored him. She compared him with the long-haired sickly youths in Socialist clubs whose devotion she could always command as easily as she could stir anger and dislike in Bobby. She thought of the fierce and hungry crowds in Denbury upon whose passions she could play. And she recalled the astonishing language in which their new employer had spoken of their starving. Her personal and political passions reinforced each other, as when she wrote her novels. She thought quickly, and had her plans complete before she arrived at her home.

Her flat was dreary. She was served by a cook, a waiting-maid, and a secretary, and her rooms were of a good size and might have been comfortable. But she had taken no pains to make them either comfortable or pretty. Her furniture and pictures and ornaments all looked as though they had been bought one day in a violent hurry with no regard to convenience or congruity.

She told her maid to pack her bag and swallowed a plateful of sandwiches which she found on the dining-room table. Her well-trained secretary, at work in the same room, took not the slightest notice of her. Miss Baker ate without speaking. Finally she drank a glass of wine and went into the adjoining room, her library. Here she sat down at her desk. Here, too, the gruff affectation passed out of her manner and the discontent out of her face as she engaged upon the occupation for which her best talents were created, the expression of ideas on paper. Writing

without a pause from first to last, spelling out the words in big capital letters upon a sheet of foolscap, she expressed, in the form of a leaflet addressed to the Men and Women of Denbury, her ideas of Bobby Wilton. When she had finished, she read what she had written, and read it yet again, contracting the muscles of her forehead in the labour of criticising the matter. But she did not find a word that needed to be changed. She judged, and she was well able to judge, that she had chosen the fewest and the fittest sentences in which to make the people of Denbury share her opinion of Bobby. So, seeing that her work was good, she lifted the foolscap and held it at arm's length to look at it. She actually smiled at it, and well she might, for it was one of the sweetest things in the world: it was Power.

After this Miss Baker wrote a civil and reasonable letter to Bobby himself to suggest that he should go to Denbury and see the state of the population with his own eyes.

Lastly, with the tension of her brow relaxed, she wrote to Mrs. Hope.

25

"We ought all to feel very proud," said Mrs. Hope to her new secretary on the following morning, "that Miss Baker writes to us so fully although she is so busy with such very important work. Do you know that even Mr. Hope says it is important work because he thinks it is the only instance where a strike has been carried on entirely by charitable contributions. Now let us see what Miss Baker says this morning. Yes, I thought it would be so. She thinks we ought to make another really great effort to collect more money. That will mean that we ought to write a really large number of letters this morning. Then she says this: '*I have seen Wilton. His little finger is to be thicker than his uncle's loins. His uncle did chastise us with whips, but he will chastise us with phrases. "For all I*

care, the strikers may starve themselves stiff." These are his very words, as I thank my lucky star. You are please to collect every penny you can get, but be most careful not to publish any statement of what you collect. Let it be as private as may be. Pass on this word to all the others. I am going myself to Denbury to-night. I am more than ever sure that out of Denbury we shall get that candle to light all England. This young man is Squire of the Squires, bold, arrogant, proud, scornful, contemptuous, "pitiless and wrathful, inexorable, keen." He has retired to his den in Somerset. But he shall be asked to a conference at Denbury. He will hardly refuse. If by then the famous Phrase has sunk into the heads of our strikers, and if by chance there should have been a shortage of the food supply, we might see——'"

There was silence while Mrs. Hope read to the end of the letter.

"Well," she said, "of course we ought to make a great effort to write a great many letters to-day to ask for contributions. I think it is quite likely that Miss Baker was very tired when she wrote this letter last night, because some of it is not coherent, is it? We ought not to wonder at her being tired. Now will you give me a piece of notepaper, because I must write a private letter to Miss Baker first of all, and then I will dictate some of the letters asking for contributions, and I hope they will all be done before to-morrow afternoon, because it is a half-holiday and you will be wanted in the churchyard."

26

Mr. Brownbill, the schoolmaster, was the public orator of Coulscombe. He spoke from the window seat opposite the great fireplace in the hall at Orchard Wilton. What with the cheers and owl-hoots and cries of Hurray and View Halloo and the blowing of whistles and the spirit-stirring sound of the horns it was next to impossible to hear what

he said; but this mattered the less because he had been careful to announce that he had had no time for the preparation of his speech. Mr. Kinglove, the deaf landlord of the Wilton Arms, stood just beneath him, roaring so as nearly to blow the schoolmaster flat against the shutters. The Kinglove children shouted with delight round their father's legs. The sound of enthusiasm held equally in all parts of the hall. From the schoolmaster you could only catch those words that he reiterated most often and with most emphasis—"Coulscombe," "Sir Robert," "Pride," "The Government," "Tyranny," "a Hinnercent Gurl."

It would be easier to name those absent than those present. Mr. Stanborough, for instance, was absent, uncertain how the Wilton family would now view his indiscretion in telling Bessie's story to Mr. Wake, and being thus the prime cause of this remarkable demonstration. But Mr. Wake himself was here, erect and stern in the very middle of the hall, cheering the word "Robert" and groaning inexpressible things at "Hinnercent." His big sons stood behind him. In this group also were Mr. Champneys of Hill Farm, John Burdon of Ketstable, Billows of Little Copse, Dent, the Oxfordshire landlord of the Fox, and Lidderman, the postmaster. The Hartbridge men were here, Richards of the Hartbridge George, performing on his horn at intervals, and Oxley of Toll Farm, and Murt the huntsman who danced from foot to foot like a child as he cheered and roared. And here were Easter from the moor and Woolley from the farm at Chipsford four miles off. Two of his workfolk had come with him. But these were in another group, with Burdon's cowman and the pot-boy from the Fox and two of the keeper's men and young Trevor from the forge, darkest and ruddiest and sturdiest and tallest of all the boys of Coulscombe. He waved a branch of young Scotch fir and at times of silence you could hear it as it swished round his head.

The stablemen were gathered on the left by the Jacobean screen, modestly placed but not modest in their share of the uproar. Some of them knew that corner of the hall very well, for it was there that two of them slept always, armed to the teeth, if Sir Robert and Dick Trevor were away. From them came the shrill sound of the silver whistles. Mr. Trevor, the coachman, only clapped his hands. And Donne the woodman had a whistle too, of deeper tone. Matt the hedger made noises like the hooting of a great large-throated owl, and his brothers, the gardener's boys, imitated the noise but not the owl. Dick Barcombe cracked a whip above their heads. Almost every man and woman wore a bit of blue ribbon showing somewhere; plenty was left from the last election. Only those from afar had changed their work-day clothes, though of the boys who had scout's uniform some had dressed up and brought their long poles to beat on the oak floor of the hall. These were gathered near the door that opened on the terrace, and the men from Yembridge were with them, Drage the publican and Wallingfield and Geare the farmers, with half a dozen of their men. The women out of Coulscombe kept mostly by the archway on the right, and waved blue flags and handkerchiefs. Mrs. Doyle, the shopwoman, had a tambourine. The servants of the house, in red dresses and white aprons, stood together at the door of the dining-room. Sir Robert and Lady Wilton were by the fireplace, with Mrs. Wilton and Miss Wilton and Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Forth and Sir James Birley the judge, who were staying in the house. But of those whose names have not been mentioned there were too many to be told in full. The four tall sons of Cox the wheelwright were here, dark as gipsies, together calling cooey on all notes high and low, and the grey-headed brothers from the mill, Mr. Vorley of the Church Farm and Dennet from Coul Bridge, the swarthy dairyman from Low End, with his

sons excelling in wild calls and cries, and the Trevors of Manor Farm, and the broad and blue-eyed breed of Yeo from Coulscombe who were unceasing on the View Halloo.

Bobby turned to speak to his wife, standing on the hearth-rug, and saw that her lip was quivering. "Did you ever see such jolly fellows?" he said, speaking close to her ear.

"But how often do they do it?" said she.

"Oh, they 're taken this way sometimes," he answered. "They wait for the next opportunity. As soon as I heard Uncle Stan had bust the secret I expected they 'd come up to-night. They 've not had a show like this since we were married. You must give the women tea in the drawing-room and I 'll take the farmers to the billiard room and the sons of toil can stay and have drinks here."

"It 's the most delightful thing I ever saw in my life," said Marian.

"Oh, you 'll get used to it in time," he told her. "Look at Aunt Elizabeth; she hasn't even stopped knitting."

"Mr. Brownbill is putting everything down to the scandalous conduct of the Government," said Marian.

"Never fear for Brownbill," laughed Bobby.

When Mr. Brownbill's mouth ceased to open and shut, and remained open at its full extent, while his hand waved round above his head, it was known that his speech was ended. He had called for cheers. So all descriptions of uproar were raised in double volume, and all heads were turned from the speaker to the fireplace where Bobby and his party were standing. Miss Wilton raised her eyes from her knitting and glanced round the hall with placid satisfaction. No one could have foretold how long the din would continue, or what could occur to stop it.

"Wait a minute," said Bobby, stepping forward and raising his hand. "Wait a minute," he repeated, looking as happy as anybody and wholly without embarrassment,

while the noise died down. "Thank you all very much indeed for coming and giving me such a good cheer. I don't expect they 'll try kidnapping any more Coulscombe girls at present." (Here he was interrupted by roars of delighted laughter.) "But if they do, we 'll give them the same as they 've had this time." (Loud enthusiasm now made it necessary for him to raise his hand again.) "Bessie Wake had done no more wrong than this table. Remember that. The way they treated her was the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of. But we Coulscombe people know how to look after ourselves." (The applause again threatened to become permanent.) "We 've looked after ourselves this time, with no lawyers or policemen to help. And we 'll do the same next time too." (He secured a hearing for yet another sentence.) "Thank you all very much indeed for coming."

27

An hour later he lay on his back on the hearth-rug in Marian's bedroom, his head on a cushion, his heart full of pleasure.

"Did you ever see such jolly fellows in your life?" he said, while she sat rather sadly in her chair. "How I 'd like to see them all going to the sack of London! They can ride, almost every man of them. I must get more of them to that boxing. And shooting, they 'll have to join the damn Territorials, there 's no help for it. It 's a shame they shouldn't have the training. 'Pon my word, weren't they angels to-night? Do you know, they did the same when I came back after my breach of promise? Who 'd be a bad master if his boys were like mine? Do you know, there 's not a fellow among them who hasn't got something to say for himself. They 're *damn* good company, Marian, really. And Brownbill! I say, I expect he 's about the only fellow there is who makes long speeches and hasn't

ever yet had *one* word heard by anybody. Don't they make a row? I simply must work up that boxing class. And, oh, your lawyer fellow told me of a man who 'd come and give chemistry classes. I 've written. And we 'll have to think what to do with them at Christmas, this time. Carpenter shall preach on Christmas day. Or better still, he shall have a young men's service in the servants' hall. He 'd just love it. Marian, what are you going to wear to-night to look pretty for Carpenter and Uncle James and Keddy? I 'd like something long and blue and stupendous. Never mind about mourning."

"Now Bobby," she said when his effervescence was subsiding, "I 'm going to vex you. I 'm not satisfied about Denbury."

"Denbury be hanged!"

"Yes, but that 's no good. I am not satisfied about it."

"Why not?"

"Because they 're starving. Your men are shouting and happy, and mine are starving."

"My fellows are yours and yours are mine," he said sharply.

"Beloved, that doesn't alter the fact that they are starving," she answered. "I have had a letter from the Roman priest there. It 's a reasonable letter, not like the others. He says something ought to be done."

"'Pon my word, if they 're starving they can go back to work," said Bobby. "Do they think we 're going to sweat them like Uncle George? I 'd like to take Coulscombe riding into Denbury and send them to work with crops and lashes. 'Pon my soul, I would."

"I am not satisfied about them," said Marian quietly.

"What do you want to do, then?"

"I want to settle the strike."

"Then look here. I 'll do something for you," he cried. "I 'll do it on purpose to please you. I 'll do something

better than anything else that could possibly be done. I 'll send an envoy to Denbury. I 'll settle it all in four and twenty hours. I 'll send Michael."

"The gamekeeper?"

"Yes."

"They 'll think we 're mad."

"Let them."

"But what can Michael know about it?"

Bobby sat upright. "Marian," he said, "Michael knows a great deal more about business than you think. He knows much more than I do myself. He 's got more sense in his little finger than the whole Labour party put together. Michael knows what 's right. If we 've got Denbury on our conscience, we 'll trust Michael."

"Oh, couldn't you go yourself?" she pleaded.

"Never," said he. "They can come to us, if they want us, but we won't go to them, not this side of their submission."

"You are a hard man, Bobby," she sighed.

"You want me to go grovelling to that Baker in petticoats," said he.

Then she laughed at him, a course which experience had proved to be the wisest.

"Silly little Bobby, Miss Baker has frightened you more than any one you have met for years. I wouldn't be so cruel as to send you to her. No, I shall make Uncle James Birley talk to you and you will succumb to your reverence for his grey hairs. I want——"

"What?" he asked, while she gazed thoughtfully at the dull red fire.

"I want you to learn that Coulscombe is not the world, alas!"

He sprang up and bent and kissed her hand. "I 'm going to dress," he said. "Don't you worry about Coulscombe not being the world."

28

It was true that Bobby was easily led by a wise old man with charming manners. But he kept his uncle at the billiard table after dinner, and there was no time for conversation about Denbury. However, a stronger influence was preparing.

Master Charles Edward Marcus Durwold saw fit to say good-bye to his school friends at seven o'clock that evening, and to change into holiday clothes and climb down from the window of his room in Mr. Robinson's house by the drain-pipe provided for the purpose. He walked to the station, and entered the train for London. He had excellent reasons for his departure from Maryhill. For the third time in one term he had incurred the highest magisterial displeasure, while for the first time in his experience he saw a chance of committing two crimes in exchange for one punishment. In London he walked to Paddington station and bought a ticket for Newton Royal. It was little after eight o'clock and his train did not leave until ten minutes to ten. He had three shillings left in his pocket. First he bought three boxes of wax matches at a penny each, and then the rest of his money he squandered recklessly upon the best dinner of Friday fish that the dining-room would give for two and ninepence. With the comfort of the food there entered him also the light-heartedness of those who possess not a farthing. He walked up and down the main departure platform wondering what steps the Maryhill authorities would take towards the recovery of his valuable person.

He slept without waking until his train reached Newton Royal. It was then five minutes past two in the morning, and torrents of rain were descending on the roof of the station. With characteristic imprudence he had brought no overcoat. He stood on the platform and rubbed the drowsiness out of his eyes and opened a conversation with

a porter by saying that he had no money and proposed to walk to Coulscombe. The distance was fourteen miles, the porter said, and he told the names of the villages to be passed on the way, and the road by which he should leave the town. Durwold walked out into the rain. "Christamento!" he said to himself, as the first great drops ran down his neck, "I am not the stuff heroes are made of. Five bob and I 'd go to a hotel for the night."

He pulled himself together, and trudged forward rather miserably. It delighted him still, of course, to think of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson at Maryhill still wringing their hands over his empty bed, but, just at present, his chuckles were tempered by bodily discomfort. His way lay through a sort of suburb, at first, and afterwards came a long hill. At the top of this he obeyed an instinct to stop and look round. There was nothing to be seen, but he knew that he had left the town behind him. There was a rich earthy scent in the air. Again and again he breathed long draughts of it. He spread out his palms for the rain to beat on them. "After all," he thought, "this is not going to be so bad." When he went forward again his pace was quicker and his stride more vigorous. The next impulse was to whistle. School songs and music-hall songs and songs from comic opera he whistled loud against the black night around him, his appetite for music increasing with his joy. Then the rain abated. He passed through the first village, and struck a bundle of matches at the junction of two roads to illumine the names on the sign-post. A little later he heard a motor-car bearing up behind him. He stepped aside and stumbled against a heap of broken stones. "Are they after me?" he thought. "Then I 'll fight a rearguard action of the *genus* flint-in-the-eye." He filled his hands and pockets with broken flint, and crouched in a ditch half full of water. The car rushed past unheeding. He tramped along after it, happier than ever.

Here was a case of the influence of circumstance on character. Durwold flirting with pretty typists had been an innocent but unpromising figure. Durwold plodding westwards over broad slopes of country in the night on an errand of life and death was becoming capable of much. He was going, it might be, to save a man from murder. He was bearing a message which might have been sent equally well by letter or telegram, but he had chosen a course more pleasing and exciting for himself, and he was going to do astonishing things if any one tried to stop him. He laughed at the thought that it must have been a dozen years since he had struck a blow in anger. His rule of courage had been only to bear things smiling, which may be characteristic of his generation. But it seemed that the clock had run back now to an age of violence and murder, an age that called for something more than passive courage. It was very exhilarating. He hoped that Mr. and Mrs. Robinson were finding it exhilarating too. And then he returned to his laughter. He whistled again, and the tunes that came were the gayest of all he knew.

It was after six o'clock when he reached Coulscombe, not knowing that he was tired. The stars were shining. He had never seen the place before; he had never, indeed, seen Bobby except once in Yardale's house and again lately at Maryhill. In the village street he did not know where he should turn. He walked on, provisionally, and at the end of the village the great stone gateway of Orchard Wilton came into view suddenly. He opened the iron gate, and no one challenged him. He followed the drive through the park, up a long and winding hill, and strained his eyes for the house. At last something came between him and the stars in front. The tall front of the most exquisite of Jacobean houses loomed dimly in outline, and the stars were reflected in the panes of some of its innumerable windows. The barking of two dogs broke the silence, and

drew nearer to Durwold as they scampered up from somewhere. "Dogs," he said, "I 've thrown away my flints and I don't know what is done on these occasions. Smell my innocent hands and be sensible."

"Who is that?" called a voice from an upper window, which he recognised as the voice of Bobby.

"Eddie Durwold," he answered.

"My goodness!" the answer came, "talk nicely to those dogs, or they 'll bite. I 'll come and let you in."

In two minutes the door opened, and Bobby stood holding a candle under the stone that bore the motto of his house and race, *Territus Terreo.*

29

"You madman! You crazy fellow! Why, you 're a fellow after my own heart, I believe," he said, as he locked and bolted the door. "You 've run away from school and walked from Newton Royal? Why, they 'll catch me with Habeas Corpus for having you here at all. What luck that I know all about it! You 're soaking. And there 's not a fire in the house. You must have a half bottle of fizz before anything else. Come to the dining-room. My word, won't they lick you when they get you back!"

"I say, I don't want to interrupt the flow of your delightful hospitality," said Durwold when they reached the dining-room. "But I 'm a teetotaler and I 've got something rather important to say."

"You may not obey other people," said Bobby, as he wrestled with the cork of a bottle, "but if you come here you 'll obey me. There 's a cake in that cupboard. You get it out and eat it and then drink this and then I 'll take you to bed and then you 'll be as right as anything. What 's your important thing?"

"They 're going to lynch you at Denbury," said Durwold.

The cork left the bottle like a bullet, and hit a family portrait that the candle lighted dimly.

"I say, you 're awfully good," Durwold observed, "but I really don't want this stuff."

"You 've got to have it," said Bobby. "So some one 's going to lynch me?"

Durwold gulped down a whole glass of the champagne, which he disliked, but from which he derived a certain benefit instantly.

"I might have written, but I got an idea that I 'd come myself," he said. "First of all, I suppose you know all about Denbury and the strike and Miss Baker?"

"I do," said Bobby, with much emphasis.

"Well, secondly, I suppose you know about my being really rather good at making friends with the spies that the ladies of Maryhill send to catch me in my evil practices. First came Miss Wake, and after she left we had Miss Latona, and somehow or other I made the same sort of friendship with Miss Latona as I made with Miss Wake. But the never-to-be-tired Miss Pree interrupted us at about five o'clock yesterday afternoon, and there is another combustiamento. That doesn't matter to you, though. What I thought would interest you was that Miss Latona gave me a copy of a letter about you and Denbury. I 'm afraid it has got awfully wet in the rain. It 's a letter which Mrs. Hope had from Miss Baker yesterday morning. It gave Mrs. Hope a headache and she and Mr. Hope and Miss Agg left at once in a violent hurry with their luggage labelled Denbury. The letter was left about, and Miss Latona copied it, and fixed up a meeting with me, and handed over the copy. Her idea is that the notion of stringing you up to a lamp-post in Denbury does *not* appeal to the Hopes but it obviously appeals a lot to Miss Baker. The rest of our conversation was spoilt by Miss Pree, and to tell you the truth I don't think it would be a bad thing if

you could manage to do something for Miss Latona, for she 'll be out of a job now, and it was rather good of her to run risks for the sake of saving your life. Doesn't it seem funny to talk of saving life? It seemed natural out in the rain. It seems funny in here."

"I 'm blessed if I can make it out," said Bobby, poring over the flimsy typewritten sheet which Durwold had given him. "The rain has made the ink run all over the place. Chastise with what? Phrases? I say, Miss Baker must drink. *These are his very words, as I thank,*—what does she thank?"

"Her lucky star," said Durwold, leaning over his shoulder.

"Oh, her lucky star; and what were the words and who said them? Oh, it 's about me! *Starve themselves stiff.* I remember now. I said that to Miss Baker. *Out of little Denbury shall come*—a what? A candle? My word, she 's poetical. *A candle to light all England. Bold, arrogant, proud, scornful, contemptuous, pitiless and wrathful, inexorable, keen*—that comes in Latin, Eddie. I say, I 'm beginning to be interested in this. *He shall be asked to a conference at Denbury.* I 've been that already. *He will hardly refuse.* Oh, won't he? *If by then the famous*—something—I can't make head or tail of this. What is it?"

"*The famous phrase,*" said Durwold. "That 's what you said about their starving stiff. Let me read it now. I read it before it got wet. *If by then the famous phrase has sunk into the heads of our strikers, and if by chance there should have been a shortage of the food supply, with perchance also a cork knocked out of some great beer barrel, we might see a foretaste of things to come. If the Denbury men prefer to see Wilton swinging from a lamp-post rather than their own children starving stiff, they will have their opportunity. Never was such provocation. Poor fools, they will not do it, but such are my midnight dreams. Yours. F.* She has jolly dreams at midnight, hasn't she, Sir Bobby? When she 's

had me swished and you hanged, what do you think she 'll do next?"

"'Pon my word I don't know how to thank you for bringing this news," said Bobby. "I never guessed, I never dreamed of such a thing. It alters everything. I 'd made up my mind to stay here and send my keeper to settle the strike. This alters everything. Who 'd have guessed it! 'Pon my word!"

"What will you do, then?" asked Durwold, standing by the chair on which Bobby sat still poring over the letter on the table.

"I shall go to Denbury to-day," said Bobby.

"Hurray!" cried Durwold. He threw his cap up to the ceiling.

"Extraordinary," said Bobby. "If I don't give this woman something to remember, I 'll——"

But he himself remembered that Durwold was wet and tired. "Come along," he said. "Come along to bed at once."

30

Durwold slept in a bed in Bobby's dressing-room. It was ten o'clock when he was awakened by Bobby, who paced up and down the room while he talked to him.

"I want you to be careful not to say anything to my wife," he said, "nor to any one else here. My wife has been wanting me to go to Denbury, but if she knew this she would change and want me not to go. So be careful. Now of course you 'll come and stay here in the Christmas holidays, at least I hope you will, but about going back to Maryhill I 'm going to give you your choice. You can either go back and tell them the whole story yourself, or, if you 'd rather, I 'll send a fellow with you. I 'll send a fellow called Forth, whose father has one of the best-known preparatory schools in the country, and they 'll know all about him at Maryhill. He would explain why you came,

and why you had to keep it all a secret, and I shouldn't wonder if he got you off scot free. He 's staying here now, and he 'd do this for me if I asked him."

"I 'm not going back to Maryhill just yet," said Durwold.

Bobby gazed at him with surprise.

"I made up my mind about that last night," the boy said.

"What are you going to do?"

"That is what you might call a question," he replied. "But I feel inclined to have my money's worth before I go back to the impassioned embraces of Maryhill. I 'm going to ask you if you 'll take me to Denbury."

"Well," said Bobby with admiration, "in sheer devilment I believe you beat me hollow."

He left the room, and returned after ten minutes holding a bundle of telegraph forms.

"Now listen to me," he said. "I 've no quarrel with Maryhill school and I 've no quarrel with your mother. So I shall telegraph to them both to say where you are, and then they can do what they like. In the meantime, if you want to come to Denbury, you can, provided you obey my orders. I 'm not going to Denbury to be strung up to any lamp-post. If there 's any lynching done it 's not going to be me that 's lynched. If any one 's candle is going to light all England it will be my candle and not Miss Baker's. I will show those vermin something they 've not seen before. I 'll give them lessons in socialism even if it needs every fellow from every parish round Coulscombe. I 'll show Miss Baker that I can manage my affairs without her help. She appeals to force and we will see whose force is strongest. She 's not dealing with a fur-coated sort of capitalist this time. But, in case they should think me afraid, I am not taking more than half a dozen fellows there to-day. If you care to take the chance of having to fight for your life, then I shall be very glad to have you and it 'll do you all the good in the world."

"I am in luck," said Durwold.

"Then wait here," Bobby told him. "Dick will come and get you some dry clothes, and I 'll send up your breakfast while you 're dressing. We start at eleven. Now what 's your mother's address?"

31

The members of Junior Conservative Associations are told that if a nation is to be saved it must be saved by its youth. Youth has certainly a function. Wherever wisdom depends on a judgment of established alternatives, as in the science of the law, the experience of age must possess a great advantage. But it is otherwise when we require a complete departure from precedent. Lately we have honoured the name of Lord Lister, whose invention saved the lives of so many of those whose lives were fit and proper to be saved. But Lord Lister's discovery was that of a man young in his profession, and was hailed with the ridicule of the experienced. The inventiveness of youth is not always wise, but wise inventions often come from youth.

The young man whom we are to follow in his dealings with the Denbury strike was certainly not contemplating anything that appeared to him like a new departure. On the contrary, he was maintaining an ancient tradition. He was going to rebuke sharply some people who had challenged the elementary principle that he was master of his own servants and was not to be coerced or even lynched. There was nothing new about this. But reflection showed him that to Miss Baker and her legions of strikers in some dirty little town his appearance with a body of men who would break many heads before a hair of his was touched might seem a novelty indeed. And, thinking thus, he was more and more pleased. He would teach a lesson to Miss Baker and her townsmen; he would show them that his

down-trodden peasantry were worth more than themselves, and that the idea of aristocracy is not dead where any one has chosen to keep it alive. This thought, for Bobby, was something of an intellectual achievement. He embraced it with rising enthusiasm. He became worked up into a sort of missionary zeal, and meant to show that Coulscombe was right and that Coulscombe could fight. And Coulscombe stood for aristocracy. The more Bobby thought of this, the more pugnacious he felt and the more he hoped for a row.

There was a good deal of sensationalism among his plans. His party rode into Newton Royal, with their bundles across their saddles. A horse-box was attached to the train, ordered by telegraph. It was taken off at Bristol, and joined to the Gloucestershire train. Yet they did not travel by rail as far as Denbury. They left the train at Beltington, three miles from Denbury, and rode forward as though it had been Coulscombe they were entering. The party deserves some description.

Michael Jones, the gamekeeper, a man over fifty, was by birth a Londoner. A step-mother had driven him from home when he was very young, and he had gone to his own mother's people in Sussex, in the parish where Mr. Birley was vicar. Mr. Birley was the father of Bobby's mother. This connection brought Michael to Coulscombe as game-keeper when he was about thirty. He was soon acclimatised, and he married one of the Trevors. By now his golden whiskers were touched with grey, he was bald, and he carried a pair of gold-rimmed glasses that travelled between his pocket and his nose a hundred times a day. He was small, neatly built, dapper, and erect. Except for the golden whiskers he was clean shaven. His complexion was ruddy, his eyes were small and blue and keen, his expression shrewd and kindly, and his manner much tinged with authority.

Next in seniority was Mr. Kinglove, the deaf landlord of the Wilton Arms. Any one with direct animosity could have described Kinglove as bloated. He was large, corpulent, and florid. He had good business acumen, great physical strength, and perfect fidelity. But he would never have been mistaken, like Michael, for a country clergyman. He would never, like Michael, have read *The Times*. He was a good judge of horseflesh and had a fine tongue for the stronger forms of language.

In Dick Trevor we make a return to virtue. Dick, who was three years older than Bobby, had been at one time a soldier. For two years he had been an apprentice in the Swindon locomotive works. For better or worse he could handle a motor car, a yacht, a horse, the contents of a wardrobe, a book of accounts, and even cook a dinner, all with the happy inspirations that fortune gives to the brave. His life had alternated between the service of the Wilton family and these other occupations, from each of which he returned a better all-round fellow. He was sober minded, conscientious, and observant. In boyhood he had been Bobby's most constant companion, and had saved the younger and more reckless boy from all sorts of scrapes and dangers. He had been gardener's boy, had served under his father the coachman, had been on a farm, and was now something between a valet and a private secretary. He had not married. Of all his occupations it was that of a soldier which had most stamped his appearance.

Tom, his youngest brother, was two and twenty. He worked under the blacksmith at Coulscombe. His appearance raised suspicion of gipsy blood among the Trevor ancestors. A halo had descended on him from the moment when Bobby began the boxing classes in the village, and his pugilistic skill together with his physical strength was the cause of his coming to Denbury. At bottom he had plenty of the virtuous reliability of the Trevor breed. But,

for the time being, his face had taken on a look of the greed of blood, sometimes comically ferocious, a fact that was noticed by Durwold. Durwold found amusement in grinning at him until he was compelled to grin back.

The two other members of the party were boys out of the stables, one eighteen and one seventeen years old. Willie, the elder, was a London boy, the son of a woman whom Lady Wilton had befriended when she worked in her father's parish. The younger was Robin, son of Dennet the farmer at Coul Bridge. Well fed and high spirited, they both understood very clearly their duty on this expedition.

Denbury lies in a hollow, under hills, and the party from Coulscombe advanced at a slow walking pace as soon as the town came into view beneath them. The stable boys rode in the rear. Michael and Kinglove were in front of them. Durwold and Tom came next. Bobby and Dick rode ahead.

"How many of these strikers are there, sir?" Dick asked.

"Four or five hundred, I believe," said Bobby.

Dick reflected according to his habit.

"The Bristol paper says they have no more food," he remarked. "Put their women and children with them and it 's as if all Coulscombe was starving, and all Hartbridge, and all Chipsford, and all Yembridge, and all Ketstable. It 's a bad look-out for her Ladyship to have so many men starving, sir."

"It 's a bad look-out for them," said Bobby grimly.

"They say," said Dick, "they say in the paper that it 's the first strike there has ever been to be done by voluntary contribution. There 's no trade-union and no funds but voluntary contributions. This Miss Baker, she has collected all the money to keep the strikers and their families for three months. What I say is this. Are those men her Ladyship's men or Miss Baker's?"

"I suppose that remains to be seen," said Bobby, who did not wish to talk at this moment. Dick's argument, however, continued with calm persistence.

"If they are her Ladyship's men, sir, Miss Baker ought not to have to keep them. If they are Miss Baker's men, her Ladyship ought not to be asked to do anything, nor you, sir. If I was one of these strikers I wouldn't thank Miss Baker for making a quarrel between me and her Ladyship."

Bobby answered shortly, "Miss Baker is going to learn a lesson."

The town that lay below them had a population of about five thousand souls, and has a commonplace history. In the seventeenth century it was a centre of the woollen industry, a home of family businesses, and a place of wealth and comfort. In the nineteenth century its prosperity perished with that of numberless other small places at the time when wealth swept northwards. Denbury was left with a fine church, several large inns, a town hall, and seven or eight streets of stone houses converging on the square in the midst. Many of the houses were demolished. Fanleigh Court at Beltington was built entirely of stone carted over from Denbury. The place decayed for a generation and more, until a man named Underbell, a farmer's son, found clay in the hillside. From this came Underbell & Company, uncrackable-glaze workers of Denbury. The factory was built on the north side of the town. At first the industry depended on a patent process, but the family secrets survived the patent, and a market, not wide but very steady, remained as a freehold for the Underbells. New streets of poor and squalid houses grew up in place of what had been demolished. The railway came winding among the hills and made a terminus on the east side of the town. In 1895 the whole interest of the Underbells was acquired by Mr. George Deane, though

the old name was preserved, and then a paid manager came to take over the control which had hitherto lain in the hands of the family. Sixteen years had passed since then. Mr. Deane had never attempted to extend or improve the business, but he had extracted every farthing that it could be made to yield. He who called Bobby's house Chelsea Hospital had acquired most of the street property as well as the industry of the town, and in the matter of rent his rapacity had been fierce.

The party from Coulscombe rode in from the south, by the road that becomes South Street in the town. It was after three o'clock. A gentle drizzle was falling. Two features of the town alone stood out at all notably, the beautiful spire of the church and the hideous outlines of the factory beyond. The rest seemed to lack character of any sort.

"It is a bad place, sir," said Dick.

"Abominable," said Bobby.

On either side of them were the first houses of the street. There was a long row of squalid looking grey brick houses on the right, and the same on the left. The road was bad and the paths were not paved. Against the wall of the first house on the right there was a man leaning, holding a bundle of handbills in his hand. As they approached, he came out into the road and held one of his bills up to Bobby who rode on the right of Dick. Bobby drew rein, took the handbill, and read it.

He read: "*Men and Women of Denbury, George Frederick Deane is dead. He has left a last will and testament. We do not know to which of his family he has left his Umbrella or his Old Boots, but we know that he has left his Workpeople at Denbury to two members of the Aristocracy. One of these is Marian Grace Wilton, his niece, and the other is her husband, Sir Robert Francis Wilton, Baronet, of Orchard Wilton, Coulscombe, Somerset. This young man having been expelled*

from Eton College and Oxford University is now living in luxury and debauchery at his family mansion. Your representatives have seen and spoken with him in the matter of the Denbury strike. His reply was short and simple. He refused all concessions and said, 'For all I care the Denbury strikers may starve themselves stiff.' "

Bobby folded the bill and put it in his pocket. He looked round and saw that the man was giving copies to the others of his party.

"Come here," he said.

With a slow, lurching, gait, the man came and stood by him.

"Do those bills come from Miss Baker?" Bobby asked.

"Yes," said the man.

"Are you one of the men on strike?"

"Yes."

"One of Underbell's men?"

"Yes."

Bobby looked at him. The moment was supremely fateful. He did not mind being libelled by Miss Baker. He did not give the libel another thought. He was much too proud to care a straw that it should be read by his companions. Another consideration had entered his mind, and, striking him with the force of the unexpected, it absorbed all his faculties. For good or for ill this was an experiment on the part of the power that rules us. Bobby looked at the striker and saw, beneath ragged clothes, dirt, and squalor, under an air of the most wretched poverty, under the horror that long privation and misery write in the human face, under hopelessness and feebleness and weakness of spirit, something, nevertheless, that told him it was the sort of man he liked. His judgments were always quick, and his prejudices strong. A trace of the desperado remained in the face of the starving man. He was the wreck of a daredevil fellow who had pleased the

ladies and cut a dash. It was not much, but it was enough to turn the scale. This was Bobby's sort of man; it was not Miss Baker's sort.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, speaking in a low tone that betrayed emotion. The man looked at him, but did not answer.

"If you will come with me," said Bobby, "in quarter of an hour you shall have a meal."

"Who are you?" asked the man.

"I am Sir Robert Wilton."

No one would have credited this striker with the animation he showed. He leaped back to the path; a spasm of emotion passed across his face; his pallor deepened; every sign showed that the horror of contamination had almost overcome him. He had been talking to a devil unawares. A crimson flush spread over Bobby's face, and he rode slowly forward.

"Starving men don't fight, sir," said Dick, overtaking him.

Bobby could not answer. Before six of his own people he had been shunned as an unclean thing. For the first time in his life his bread had been refused with scorn.

"I think, sir," said Dick presently, "that man would have taken the meal only he didn't want to get something the others were not going to get."

"I suppose that was it," said Bobby.

They rode on, slowly, and as they drew towards the middle of the town they saw more of the signs of the strike. Men and women stood at the cottage doors, and there were rows of most miserable children leaning against the walls. It was all different from what had been expected at Coulscombe. Instead of rage and battle there was listlessness and gloom, hopeless faces and poverty of spirit more terrible to see than ragged clothing. The thin sad drizzle continued. Presently Dick turned his head and looked down the street behind them.

"Sir," he said coolly, "that man is following us, and collecting a crowd. Shall we ride on, sir?"

"No, we 'll go as we are," said Bobby. "I have told the Roman priest to meet us at the principal hotel. Keep your eyes open to see which that will be."

There was no doubt on this point. The White Hart, a three storeyed grey stone building, dating from the time of Queen Anne, was conspicuous on the west side of the square. They bore across to this, while the small crowd followed with curiosity but with no suggestion of violence. Bobby sprang from his saddle.

"Take the horses in," he said. "Willie and Robin had better stay and look after them. Take Tom and Kinglove into the bar, and wait there."

32

"What are we to do?" said Bobby turning upon Michael Jones in the hall of the White Hart.

The keeper fixed his glasses upon his nose, and put his right hand into his breast pocket.

"It is an actionable libel, Mr. Bobby," he answered, bringing out the handbill.

"What?"

"An actionable libel."

"That? Oh, put it away. Who cares about it? Come over here."

He led the way across the hall, heedless of the gaze of those standing by the bar. By the glass door at the other end he faced round with the abruptness of a man in dire perplexity.

"In any court of law, sir, for this libel, you have a right to heavy damages—" began Michael cheerfully.

"What good is that to me?" said Bobby. "Rights? Didn't I come here on purpose to enforce my rights? I

thought—God knows what I didn't think. They are starving, Michael. I never saw anything like it. I never saw anything like the face of that fellow with the leaflets."

"A bad young man, sir," said Michael.

"Who cares for his badness? You 're not helping me," said Bobby bitterly.

Michael tried to look concerned.

"Firmness and justice are the truest kindness, Mr. Bobby," he observed, and tugged dubiously at one of his golden whiskers.

"But the faces of the people we passed!"

Bobby's perplexity was painful. He stood staring at the empty air, beating his leg with his whip, moved by thoughts that could not enter Mr. Jones's optimistic mind.

"If I am to enquire into their grievances, sir, I will do it with the best of my care and ability," he said, and this, after all, was the object of his coming.

"What would my grandfather have said?" Bobby asked blankly. "What would people think at home? What should I say to the people who come down from London and talk about things? These men are her Ladyship's men as much as my men are mine. Don't you see? She 's responsible."

Michael was able to look sympathetically worried, but he was too shrewd to risk himself out of the sphere of business into that of Marian's responsibilities. Then Bobby's beating of his leg ended with a decisive slash, and his face settled into resolve.

"Wait for me," he said. "There 's a Roman priest somewhere here to see me. I 'll settle something soon."

33

Father Gauden was a man after one of the patterns that Bobby liked most of all. He was about fifty years old,

quiet-looking, handsome, and dignified, and he listened more than he talked. The greater part of his life had been passed at Rome. On the failure of his health he had been sent as chaplain to the small convent on Laxley Hill, above the town of Denbury. He was without affectation, without peculiarity, without bodily deformities or mental particularities. He was an ordinary person and a gentleman.

But the Rev. Mr. Trevanion, the vicar of Denbury, had all the qualities that Father Gauden lacked. He was on the road to a bishopric, already, though he was not thirty-five. He was as hard as nails, thin, tall, dark, keen, with an enthusiasm in his eyes. He was thoroughly up-to-date, and had thrown his heart and soul into the most progressive of the movements within the Church, the social movement.

"Please understand," he said, as the men of religion sat together in a private room at the White Hart, "and I want to make this perfectly clear, my objections have nothing whatever to do with the question of church and church. I am the strongest of churchmen, but I have always felt this, that I should be making the most childish mistake if I did not welcome co-operation from all who care to help. Please let it go no further—it is hardly the betrayal of a confidence—but I would rather it went no further—I happen to know that Miss Baker herself is inclined to atheism, yet I have never let that have the slightest effect on the relations between us. I only mention that to show you that it is not any ecclesiastical narrowness which actuates me."

"Indeed, I should never have supposed it," said the priest.

"Good," said the young vicar. "You must forgive my going into these points—they are really important—and I want to make my whole position perfectly clear. I was afraid you might think a mere sectarian intolerance was actuating——"

"But I thought no such thing," said the priest, smiling.

The vicar smiled also, not to be outdone in pleasantness. "Then in that case I come to another point," he said. "The strike committee would not only be pleased if you would join their number, but they would welcome you with the greatest possible eagerness. Your position in the matter would be regularised. Your ignorance, as you call it, in industrial questions, would be amply compensated by the experience of the other members. In fact, you would not be a source of weakness to the committee; you would be a source of strength!"

It was an inspiring, flattering, magnanimous, concession. The priest bowed gravely in acknowledgment. "It is utterly impossible, however," said he.

"In that case, Father Gauden," said the vicar, "I can only repeat to you—and you must forgive the directness of what I say—directness is always best—your intervention between the strike committee and the owners is sheer madness. If it is not betraying a confidence I may tell you privately—please let it go no further at present—your action will utterly frustrate the committee's plans, and you will be simply defeating your own benevolent objects. I know, of course, that your objects *are* benevolent; I don't doubt it."

"My object," the priest rejoined, "is to keep the appointment made by Sir Robert Wilton in the telegram I have shown you, which is solely due to my writing to Lady Wilton the letter I showed you on Wednesday last.' I could have done no otherwise than come here to-day."

"Pardon me," said the vicar in keen debating style, "you could have informed the strike committee that you were coming, instead of merely sending word to me at the last available moment. The least semblance of going behind the backs of the committee at this stage can only lead to confusion and disaster. Social solidarity absolutely demands——"

"Father Gauden, here 's Sir Robert Wilton," said the waiting maid of the White Hart, throwing open the door.

Both men looked up to see the author of the famous saying about the starving strikers. Both were taken aback. Neither had expected to see so young a man, nor a man in such homely dress, nor a man with such a strange and arresting urgency showing in his face.

"I must introduce myself, Sir Robert," said the priest. "I received your telegram. This is Mr. Trevanion, the vicar of Denbury whom, I took the liberty of asking to meet us."

Bobby shook hands with both men, liked the one and despised the other, flung his cap and gloves and whip upon the table, and sat down astride a chair near that which the priest had occupied. The priest resumed his seat, perceiving this to be expected of him.

"It is extremely good of you to meet me," said Bobby. He spoke in a low voice, and quickly. "I have just come through the town. These men are starving. They are starving literally. They are hungry."

"That is the case," said the priest.

"This strike must be stopped at once; it must be stopped this evening," said Bobby. "Now I have brought a man of business, my game-keeper, here with me. I want him to meet the strikers immediately; no matter who or which; any who know the facts. I am going to ask your help. I must. I can thank you afterwards but I must ask your help first. See my man of business, Father Gauden, if you yourself know the facts, and if you don't, for God's sake bring some people who do."

"But here is the chairman of the strike committee," said the priest, indicating Mr. Trevanion with his hand.

"Miss Baker's committee?"

"I believe she is a member."

"Can't you bring three or four men in from the street there, who know their grievances for themselves?"

"Yes, indeed. I could probably do it in five minutes."

"Could you also provide food, at my expense, for the whole town to-night? Enough to last them the week-end? Is there enough in the shops in the town, or could it be brought from somewhere else? Bread? Meat? Tea? Vegetables? Sugar? Jam?"

"I do not doubt that that also could be done, Sir Robert."

"If you will help me in these ways, I shall be grateful to you as long as I live," said Bobby. "There is no time to lose. The men on strike in this town are my wife's workpeople. It 's not proper that they should look as they look to-day."

34

A faint smile, a mere momentary tremor at the corners of his mouth and about the wrinkles round his eyes, expressed the feelings of Father Gauden. Two pink spots appeared on the face of Mr. Trevanion, one on each cheek-bone. Bobby also flushed a little, knowing that he had said something priggish. His excuse was that he had been shocked beyond measure by the sight of those who were to Marian as the Trevors were to him. The priest alone saw that the situation was comic.

As for Mr. Trevanion, though he had lived to be the Primate of All England, he could never have forgotten the sight of the young man, the intruder, the rejected of schools and universities, the speaker of brutal sayings, the reprobate, the aristocrat, bestriding a shaky chair, mud-stained over boots and leggings and breeches, with a shabby and torn tweed coat buttoned tight up to his neck, who, in half a dozen sentences, without the least sense of destructiveness demolished the labour of months and the ambitions of years, improved on the extremest demands of democracy by a consideration of his wife's good name, and superseded

some of the most advanced of English thinkers by his gamekeeper. There were committees, there were advisory groups, there were presidents, vice-presidents, chairmen and secretaries, associations of helpers in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Redhaven, and Cheltenham. Worse still, there was the new born Union itself, with ballot boxes and officers, with a meeting room and an office, a minute book, a bank balance, wards, divisions, rules, regulations, and patrons from the Labour benches of the House of Commons. Worst of all there were Mr. Trevanion the chaplain of the Union, and Miss Baker the living soul and buttress and creator, under God, of the whole system and fabric and organisation from top to bottom. What was to happen to this and these if the strikers had their bellies filled at Bobby Wilton's expense and went back to work on Monday with their wrongs all righted by the gamekeeper?

"It will not do," thought Mr. Trevanion, and so, being not a clever or cunning plebeian but only an industrious and ambitious one, he prepared to crush the revolutionary young squire by a most direct and brutal use of the tongue, the plebeian weapon.

"If I may be allowed to join this conversation," he said, "you appear to be under the impression that you have only to say Abracadabra to settle the Social Question. You appear to forget that you are not dealing with agricultural labourers but with an organised body of artisans who have established a right to corporate recognition. If you think you have a right to go behind the back of the strike committee, and the men's organisation, and the voluntary supporters of the strike, and Miss Baker, and settle the matter out of hand without reference to anybody whatever, you will very soon find yourself undeceived. You have not the smallest right even to give food except through the constituted channels of representation. The suggestion

is simply monstrous. We have worked for months and months and months. We——"

"Are you the vicar of Denbury?" Bobby asked.

"I am," said Mr. Trevanion pugnaciously.

"Then you can address your further communications to my solicitor," said Bobby, "or, to put it more plainly, you can go to the devil. Father Gauden, shall we go and get to work?"

The priest made one delightful gesture that indicated acquiescence yet disclaimed responsibility, and then prepared to accompany Bobby out of the room. Bobby held open the door, let him pass out, and followed him. The People's Friend was left alone on his hearth-rug rostrum, in the horror of the unexampled scandal.

It would be impossible to give any idea of the confusion that took hold of the White Hart after this. Though it was untrue to say that Bobby had been expelled from Eton or sent down from Oxford, yet he had agitated those places in an unusual degree. He agitated the White Hart, and all Denbury, not less thoroughly. It does not need a very clever man to make a very great stir. It does not need an experienced man to give other people a great many new experiences. Bobby had quite forgotten that he was the champion of aristocracy against the socialists. But if it be aristocratic to order people about he acted well up to his principle.

Some time elapsed while every one was sent to fetch every one else; Father Gauden went to find a few men of intelligence who could explain the striker's grievances; the inn-keeper's servants went to collect all the dealers in provisions; Dick Trevor went to fetch the police, Tom to send a reassuring telegram to Lady Wilton, Eddie Durwold to find a printer who would turn out handbills in less than no time. Bobby himself consolidated his annexation of the inn, had fires lighted in the sitting-rooms, and selected

bedrooms for the members of his party. As for Mr. Trevanion, he was hastening back to his vicarage, where Miss Baker lodged, to tell his griefs and to help in preparing a counterstroke.

The stir at the White Hart brought results, however. A time came when Michael Jones was actually closeted in Number Two sitting-room with four of the strikers, while Father Gauden and Bobby, in Number One, discussed victuals with two grocers, two butchers, a baker, a coal merchant, a green-grocer and a police sergeant who knew more about all men's business than they knew themselves.

Bobby invaded Number Two, and asked if they had all they wanted. "What *do* you want?" he said. "Paper? Ink? Pens? All here? They are bringing you your tea. Now please understand you may be here till midnight and everything you want Mr. Jones will get for you if you ask him." Such was Bobby's second meeting with the strikers. He returned to Number One and stood over the table while they discussed their difficulties. "Invite the strikers to my counter," said the grocer, "and every man in all the town will come." "You must arrange a system of identification," the policeman bellowed. "Identification be damned," said Bobby, "you are to supply everybody; they can settle for themselves who has a right." The baker then professed his utter inability to meet such demands tonight. "Then what town is nearest?" Bobby asked. Father Gauden thought a supply of bread from Stow-on-the-Hill could be had within an hour, and he went to telephone for this. Bobby took his chair and drove the discussion at a breakneck pace. They brought a poultry farmer who could have helped largely had he not to consider his standing customers first. He was assured that every fowl he lent should be restored on Monday in the person of a fowl from Coulscombe. "God knows," thought Bobby, "they can collect fowls enough if they work all

Sunday." Coals and firewood were ordered by telephone from Stow-on-the-Hill, whither Dick Trevor rode to see that these and other orders had attention. And so it continued. At a point, Mr. Jones came into Number One to say that his conference could go no further without the help of Mr. Adams, the manager of the factory. Bobby had heard of no such person. But the others knew him well, and a boy on a bicycle was sent to fetch him.

A reflective eye would have seen something dreadful in the manifest difficulty of finding in Denbury sufficient food to keep Denbury alive. Butchers and bakers must keep in stock not what a town requires but what a town can pay for, which two quantities had not been the same in Denbury for some weeks past. The strike pay, which the enthusiastic voluntary supporters had once kept at a fancy figure, had lately sunk to five shillings, to four shillings, and to three shillings a week for every family. The butchers and bakers were at a loss. But the hot head of Bobby and the cool head of the priest were effective in combination. The villagers of the neighbourhood were called upon for supplies. By seven o'clock it had become certain that the town would be fed before midnight.

The critic of these proceedings must remember that there is hardly anything which cannot be achieved once in a way. Time is the great reducer of all things to normality. It is time that kills high ambitions and levels the grandiose plans of social reformers and Napoleons and others who propound magnificent impossibilities. In the long run almost everything is beyond human power, but in the spasm of a crisis we find miracles thick around us. It was without premeditation that Bobby, not a very rich man, threw several hundred pounds to the tradesmen of Denbury in one evening. It was on the same unique occasion that the tradesmen and others found themselves bullied and cajoled and cursed into doing what they were sure could

688479 A

not be done. All who were involved were somewhat shaken in their feelings, some by cupidity, some by excitement, some by surprise, and some because Bobby would not hear the word "impossible." There was one, however, among the people of Denbury, who viewed these proceedings in the driest light.

Shortly before half-past six, when the night was as dark as pitch and the groups of people in the square were beginning to talk wildly of a rumour that the owners of Underbell's had surrendered every point, a small man with a trim grey beard and moustache, wearing a black overcoat and hat, walked fearlessly through the crowd in the square and entered the White Hart. He went to the bar in the hall and asked for whisky and water. As he sipped it, standing by the bar, he watched the coming and going of Bobby's messengers, and watched them not without some signs of contempt.

One of the bystanders, a cab-proprietor, approached the newcomer and spoke to him with what he evidently knew to be undue familiarity. "Evening, Mr. Adams," he said. "Time 's money to-night."

"That seems so," was the reply, spoken slowly, with a Scottish accent.

From the landing at the head of the stairs the hotel "Boots" shouted that Father Gauden wanted Mr. Perkins and Mr. Prout, who were to come at once, and there were general cries and calls for Mr. Perkins and Mr. Prout, in the hall, at the bar, at the inner bar, in the commercial room, and outside in the yard. Perkins, a green-grocer, was found upon the pavement in the square by Tom Trevor, who brought him into the hall.

"Young man," said the cab proprietor, "here is Mr. Adams."

"Is Mr. Adams the manager?" asked Tom.

"He is," said the cab proprietor,

"But do not let me interrupt," said Mr. Adams. "I am here if I am wanted; that is all."

"Then," said Tom, after the usual pause for reflection, "will you please come upstairs, sir, to Sir Robert Wilton. He is waiting for you."

There was only one room in the hotel in which Bobby could now give Mr. Adams the private interview which courtesy demanded for so important a person as the manager of Underbell's. This was the bedroom which he had chosen for himself and Durwold. One washing-stand, two beds, two horsehair arm-chairs, and two framed pictures from Pears' Annual, were the only notable features of this room. But a cheerful fire blazed in the grate.

"To tell you the truth," said Bobby, beginning the conversation, "until half an hour ago, I never knew of your existence. I ought to have known perfectly well that there 'd be a manager here, but it 's all new to me, and I simply never thought about it. If I had, I 'd not have been so rude as to do all this without consulting you."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Adams. "I am not resenting it, sir. But it is unfortunate."

"Very," said Bobby, "because I have gone and put things in the hands of Mr. Jones, my head-keeper, and I ought to have left everything to you. Well, I 'm sorry, and that 's all I can say. I shan't make such a mistake again, Mr. Adams."

"Unfortunate," continued Mr. Adams, as though he had not been interrupted, "because I could have given you some very important information, which I had already given to Mr. Deane, Sir Robert, and should have given to you had I had word of Mr. Deane's testimentary intentions or had I been consulted by you or the solicitors. I am thinking that some will think highly of your charity towards the town, Sir Robert, and some will think you have a new-fangled way of settling strikes, but I fear you will

be wasting a large sum of money, for there has not been any prospect, not for months, that the factory would ever be at work again. A small business like this could never outlive such a strike. I think we have lived for many years on nothing but the name of Underbell, and now the market is supplied with German ware at a price we could not hope to dream of. And so it has been, since we broke the contract to supply the Coronation mugs in June."

"You mean that the business is ruined?" said Bobby.

"I mean it indeed."

"Then what the devil is to happen to these strikers? How are they going to live?"

"That is a question we might inquire of Miss Baker. But they will live no more by the work at Underbell's, nor will I, nor will you."

The only thing for Bobby to do, at the moment, was to laugh. "Then when Mr. Deane left the factory to my wife," he said, "he was playing a sort of practical joke."

"Very possibly," said Mr. Adams, who thought Mr. Deane had well chosen the victims of his fun.

Bobby looked him in the eyes, wondering if he had anything to suggest, and realised that the ruin of the factory must deprive this middle-aged man of his post and salary as manager. Then came a knock at the door, and Tom Trevor entered and said that the police had come to make enquiries about Durwold.

35

The police, acting for Durwold's mother, were satisfied with Bobby's pledged word that the truant should return to school on the morrow.

"I have pledged myself to so much," he thought, "that a little more or less won't matter."

Mr. Adams went, for form's sake, to assist at Michael's

conference. The commissariat committee was still at work under Father Gauden in Number One. Bobby did not join them. He found peace and solitude in a billiard room on the ground floor, where he walked about in a mood of rather blank reflection. He found note-paper, and wrote to his wife, giving her a bald account of that which had occurred. He wrote no opinions of his own, for there were none to write. He was not prepared to say how a man should behave when the population of a strange town is thrown upon his charity without warning in the past or limit in the future.

When he had fastened his letter and thrown it down with one comprehensive unprintable exclamation of his feelings towards Denbury, his glance lit on the billiard balls upon the table. He picked up a cue and went to the end of the table and sent the balls plunging to the opposite cushion, one after another, as fast as he could keep them going. "Why should I have these conundrums to settle?" he thought. "Why aren't I left in peace?" The billiard balls raced up and down the table faster and more wildly. The knots of anger and temper swelled upon his brow. "I have either got to be a hypocrite or be a prig," he said. Then the red ball shot violently off the table, crashed among the furniture, and rolled to a dishonoured refuge near the coal box. He left it where it lay, flung himself astride a chair, and laughed the hollow laugh of acquiescence in fact.

As he knew, he had been caught fairly this time. It was true that he loved a quiet life at Coulscombe. But it was true also that his quiet had seldom endured long. "Rows, always rows," he thought, admitting the justice of fate. Rows at home, rows at school, rows at Oxford! And now, in the company of seven men chosen for little except their courage he had come to Denbury in the hope of such a fight, against such odds, as he had never thought that he would see again. Here was a fair trap laid for an aristo-

cratic spirit. He had come in the exuberance of his pugnacity. He found no place for pugnacity, but a call for the uttermost farthing on his honour as a feudal lord. He was caught truly in the folds of his own nature, and the dreamy meditation in his eyes bore witness against him; for even now, though he knew he had been a fool, the adventurous look was returning. He sat gazing into the dark night outside, and dreamed of a new escapade more uncommon than any that had been before.

36

He dreamed of confounding all his enemies, all those against whom he was prejudiced, Miss Baker, the Socialists, the Radicals, the scraggy intellectuals, the swaggering millionaires, the progressive Conservatives who believe in systems of reform, and the pious people who hold it unchristian to profess oneself superior to the lower classes. He thought he might confound them all in a new way, not by making his Coulscombe boys beat Denbury in fight, as he had intended, but by causing aristocracy to behave in Denbury as it would behave in Coulscombe. He dreamed of having his triumph here in Denbury by an application of the simple rule his grandfather used to teach him, that he had no right to his dinner unless all people on his land had dinners of their own in peace and plenty. If he were to behave in that spirit towards the Denbury workpeople, until they could earn their own living again, he would still be doing what he set out to do in the morning with his horses and his men. He would still show that Coulscombe was right. Also, what suited his temper, he would see his enemies annoyed. He would rub their noses yet further and deeper in Coulscombe principles, for he would show them the truth that he had been taught by precept and by rod and by lash, and by experience, that ·y is based not on wealth or culture or manner or

intellect, but on the recognition that *noblesse oblige.* Thus he extended the boastful ideas he had formed in the morning. Bobby was not very clever, but the extension was, after all, a simple one.

Notions of this sort do not retain their first brightness. Some one came to say that Father Gauden wanted him. He had to go upstairs, therefore, and help to coerce a grocer who had returned in fear of the crowd. For another who would not trust his word he had to sign promises to pay for goods. In a light so sordid his dreams grew pale. Once more the police were afraid the hungry men and women would tear one another to pieces in the shops, and other tradesmen had panics about their payment. All that Bobby had found in Denbury yet, except the manager, one dissipated striker, and the Roman priest, he loathed. He saw that Marian was right, that Coulscombe was not the world. At eight o'clock, when Michael came to report on his negotiations, to advise a sweeping rise of wages and lowering of rents, he found these subjects involved a mass of detail that his head was too weary to take in. Nor were they important, after the manager's disclosures. Seven o'clock came, and the police reported that the feeding of the town was making good progress. That news encouraged Bobby at least to order dinner for himself. The priest and Michael dined with him, and Durwold came in from his walk about the town, but all the conversation was between the priest and Michael, and it was about the figures of the trade. There was nothing left of Bobby's dream. He listened to Michael's talk. The conditions of the trade were a hollow subject to Bobby who knew the trade to exist no more. But the thousand hungry beings, they existed, and he said to himself *I have been caught fairly!*

37

After dinner Bobby took Durwold to the billiard room

and told him of the drastic action of his mother, that she had telegraphed to the police at Coulscombe, that the Coulscombe policeman had referred her to Denbury, that the Denbury police had made enquiries, and that he had promised to send him back to Maryhill to-morrow. "I 'm sorry, Eddie," he added sadly.

"My dear Bobby, I 've got to thank you for the most amusing day I 've had for ages," the boy answered.

"Will you go back to-morrow, then?"

"I promise."

"You 're a good fellow," said Bobby. "My word! I meant to give you such a good day's fighting, and it has all been a frost. You 'll have to forgive me, Eddie. What rot I talked this morning! There 's Tom and Dick and Willie and Robin, too. I 've disappointed them all. What a life! Only bills to pay and figures to learn up, and money, money, money, and be a fool for your pains."

There was nothing for him to do, and he proposed that he and Eddie should play billiards. But Eddie looked him straight in the eyes, laughed, and confessed that he would rather walk about the town. Bobby felt hurt, but he was the last man to seek to prevent boys from being boys. He gave some good advice in blunt language and let Eddie go his own way.

Eddie, too, was hurt. He would have liked to tell Bobby a secret that was filling his mind and lighting excitement in his eyes. But he dared not, lest all should be spoiled.

There is need of an explanation. Shortly before six o'clock that afternoon the adventurous schoolboy, not to lose his opportunities, had gone swaggering out into the square to find what his luck might send him. He was immediately accosted by a small man with a dark moustache who wore very tidy town clothes and addressed him with practised politeness. He had been hanging about the hall of the White Hart earlier in the afternoon.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "I represent the *Daily Voice;* I was wondering if you could spare me just five minutes' conversation."

"Why, of course I will," said Eddie.

"I 'm afraid we pressmen must seem very tiresome," said the man, in a tone that advertised his soul to be more lofty than his profession. "I wouldn't think of worrying Sir Robert, naturally, but I was told that you were a friend of his. I thought, perhaps, in the Conservative interest, if you would answer half a dozen questions——"

"Answer questions? I should *love* to," said Eddie with frank delight.

"To tell the truth," the reporter added, "I have not put up at the White Hart but at the Sun in Church Street, not half a minute's walk from here. If you dislike this drizzle as much as I do, would you walk round in that direction? The White Hart is so shockingly crowded, isn't it?"

"I have not a brass farthing in my pockets, and I am a prominent teetotaller," said the boy. "But I will come to the Sun if you wish it. How very jolly of the *Daily Voice* to take an interest in *us!*"

"A curiosity," said the reporter, as they walked along. "It is a curiosity, this strike; not important, of course; on too small a scale; but Miss Baker is a remarkable woman and the public is so childish about these things. The touch of picturesqueness, you see—eminent novelist leading a strike. And Sir Robert Wilton, who was victimised by that female adventuress in the breach of promise. I was going to ask you, Mr. —— I never heard your name?"

"Durwold," said the boy.

"I was going to ask you, Mr. Durwold, what constituency was it that Sir Robert contested in the elections of 1910?"

"I believe it was somewhere in Cornwall," said Eddie.

"And has he, since then, lived a rural life in a mansion in the West?"

"I should say that described it to a tee," said Eddie.

"It is so very satisfactory to have information verified by unimpeachable authority," the reporter observed. "And this disgraceful leaflet of Miss Baker's, Mr. Durwold; I suppose you have seen it; not a word of truth in it, I suppose. Could you tell me, now, what actual words Sir Robert used on this question of starvation?"

"Not if you were to give me a thousand pounds," he answered cheerfully.

"I see, but these men he has brought here, Mr. Durwold, the gamekeeper, the publican, the blacksmith, the grooms, they are, I presume, old tenants of the estate?"

"I expect they *are*," Eddie agreed, "but that 's another point on which I 'm not exactly infallible. I don't know anything about it."

"Ah! Here is my humble abode," said the reporter, pointing to the signboard of the Sun. "Would it be too much to ask you, Mr. Durwold, to step inside?"

Eddie had no objection, and so, through the bar of an inn of no great reputation or cleanliness or sweetness, they came to a back parlour, the door of which stood open. "What are these like stars appearing?" the boy said, half to himself. A fleet of spittoons seemed to cover the whole floor of the parlour, which was hardly more than three yards square. Among the spittoons stood the legs of a deal table. Benches with sloping backs were fixed against all the walls, as in a ship's cabin, and there was a man sitting here, a thing which Eddie had not expected.

"All right, Mr. Durwold, all right," said the reporter from behind. "It is my friend Mr. Hammick. This is Mr. Durwold, Mr. Hammick, a friend of Sir Robert Wilton's."

Mr. Hammick, who was drinking, and had long been drinking, whisky and hot water, held out his hand without rising or speaking. He had been writing in a note-book on the table in front of him, and at this he continued to stare

while he held out his hand for Eddie to take and shake. He was stout, small, clean shaven, and a cockney. He looked as if he might be an ostler or the driver of a hansom cab, but not even the Headmaster of Maryhill had such an air of greatness.

"Sit down, sit down," he said loftily, while he resumed his writing. Eddie, who was quite charmed to find himself in company that seemed so disreputable, sat down, beaming with contentment, and waited for something to happen. The reporter sat beside him, and made confidential signs to the effect that Mr. Hammick must not be interrupted. "He represents some of the most important papers," he whispered. Meanwhile Mr. Hammick, like an actor, was giving himself a good entrance. It was dignified to sit and write for a few moments while the others waited in silence. Presently, still writing, he began to talk with only half his attention, so to speak. But his accent was pleasant to Eddie who was a London-bred boy.

"Risk anything," he said; "risk money, risk reputation, risk abuse, risk a libel action, risk anything in the cause of your employers, but do *not* risk a broken head. That is my advice after some years' experience of employment. But I suppose this young gentleman is not yet employed by anybody."

"No," said Eddie, whose wit was sharpened by interest in his surroundings; "but I will pass on your advice to my soldier brother."

"A hit, a palpable hit," Mr. Hammick remarked. The other reporter laughed respectfully. Eddie also laughed in sheer enjoyment. Presently Mr. Hammick reached the end of his writing, or felt his dignity to be established, for he pushed his note-book aside. He stared at the schoolboy with eyes of which it was impossible to believe that they had not spent much of their time gazing at horses.

"The young gentleman's name is—what did you say?"

"Mr. Durwold," said his colleague.

"Mr. Durwold. Very good. Well, Mr. Durwold, I trust that you will take something to drink?"

"No, nothing, thanks," said the boy.

"Quite right; perfectly right," said the great man. "I did but ask *pro forma*. But I myself will take another whisky, Mr. Brown, hot and sugared, if you will be so good as to get it for me. Earnest and industrious fellow is Mr. Brown" (when he had left the room) "but spoiled by aspirations, Mr. Durwold. Believe me, sir, though I speak through a glass, darkly, it is true now in the days of your youth, Mr. Durwold, God made the gentry and their opposites, but did fix a gulf, as likewise in the equine sphere He did make the cart-horse and the siren of the turf. My journalistic brethren, sir, have aspirations to the gentry as the sparks fly upward, but not I. I therefore hold aloof, and have authority, my efforts being otherwise. I am not a gentleman but a genius. Like the All Wise I am that I am, and so rise superior to such as Brown who are what they aren't and what no money could make 'em. Yet Brown it is that says, 'Drive a bargain, Hammick,' and I it is that now replies, 'No bargains with gentlemen.' So out it comes, sir, trusting to your honour. Of Miss Baker you have heard. Of Miss Baker I now tell you that this evening at nine o'clock she has a secret meeting of the strike committee, secret, mind you, quite secret, in the offices of the trade-union in this town. Seeing, therefore, that this same Baker has incited the ignorant populace to violence against Sir Robert Wilton, I say then, that what may transpire at the meeting to-night may have its value for me in my profession as for Sir Robert in his. Conspiracies should be watched, Mr. Durwold. How to watch it, you ask? Wait. At some slight cost of money and talent I should tell you, sir, that access has been gained to a cupboard in the room where the meeting will be held.

Hence the value of the saddler in the shop below, a venal and an avaricious man, who will admit a stranger to the cupboard. Says Brown, 'Hammick, go and spy on them.' Says I, 'Thank-you, no. Risk much for your employers, but do not risk a broken head.' Wherefore the notion strikes us that some friend of Sir Robert's may risk more for Sir Robert than we for our employers. 'A bargain,' says Brown, 'for the information is ours and ours must be the journalistic profit of what may be discovered.' 'No bargain,' say I; but I leave it to your honour, Mr. Durwold. If you should go and see what that audacious woman is now plotting, you will p'r'aps do much for Sir Robert Wilton, p'r'aps little, p'r'aps nothing, who knows but God above, but be it what it may it will be to me and Brown you owe it. Wherefore, you will hold it honourable to impart to me and Brown such things as you may learn. And Brown will write it into stylish language. But Hammick it will be that first discovered all, and Hammick whose immortal genius, like the glittering stars of heaven, saw how and where and when to utilise his smallest opportunities."

Mr. Brown returned with the glass of grog just in time for his colleague to grasp it in the very hand that was executing the last gesture of his peroration.

38

It did not take long for the bargain to be struck. The schoolboy was not sentimental, but he quickly decided that he was going to be a true and desperate ally of Bobby under circumstances such as these. It did not take him any time at all to settle it. He was ready to listen in cupboards or at keyholes or to be rolled in a bale of matting, or whatever else was required of him, for the sake of such a charming adventure as that which Mr. Hammick suggested.

He promised to tell the journalists everything he could possibly remember of that which he might see or hear. He asked them where and when they would meet him to take him to his place of hiding, and listened eagerly to what they told him. He protested that the obligation was entirely on his side. He vowed he was so good a pugilist that he had no fear whatever of venturing himself among the worst strikers or anarchists in Europe. He said it was the merest trifle. He also said that Bobby had been his friend for as long as he could remember, so that no service was too great or perilous to render him. And at every lie he told he laughed so frankly that no one could possibly have been deceived. All that was evident was that he was enchanted with the adventure, and was not likely to cheat the good fellows who had been kind enough to put him in the way of it.

He was told to come again at half-past eight to the room where he now was, to be taken to his hiding place in the cupboard above the saddler's shop. In the meantime, as has been said, he went back to the White Hart, had dinner, and was obliged to refuse to play billiards with Bobby. He was honestly sorry that he could not tell Bobby about the adventure he was to have. His judgment assured him that Bobby would not countenance spying. He would confess everything, after the event, in a due setting of penitence and humility, but it would be madness and would have diverted the whole course of Eddie's career from his cradle until now if he had ever adopted the practice of confessing his crimes before they were committed. So he left Bobby with the obvious impression that he was going out to seek the local equivalents of Miss Wake and Miss Latona and strolled round to the Sun with his hands in his pockets and his lips humming the most cheerful of all the tunes he knew.

"My colleague," said Mr. Brown, "will be happy to receive you on your return, Mr. Durwold, but at present

he is resting. We have but little time, so, if you will allow me, I will take you to your destination."

"I allow you absolutely," said Eddie.

They started upon their journey, which, like every journey in Denbury, lay across the square. Mr. Brown had an umbrella, with which he politely attempted to shelter Eddie from one half of the moisture that the drizzle was inflicting on them. "I am afraid this is *very* unpleasant," he said, as though the ordinary journalist liked nothing better than a dismal walk through a dull town on a wet evening, while only Mr. Brown saw its true horridness. "But happily it continues a very short distance. We feel sure it can be for no ordinary reason that Miss Baker has summoned her committee to meet to-night."

"Nothing that she does is *ever* ordinary," said Eddie confidentially.

"In case you should require to take anything in writing, Mr. Durwold, allow me to offer you this writing block and pencil. I suppose, however, that you do not write shorthand."

"I write quickly," said Eddie. "That is the advantage of writing lines at school."

"Lastly—er—if you should be discovered, Mr. Durwold——"

"Well?"

"I hope, I trust, I have every confidence——"

"That I shan't give you away?"

"Sir, that was my very thought."

"Right you are, Mr. Brown," he said.

The saddler's shop was shut. Mr. Brown knocked softly at the side door. It was opened by the saddler in person, an old man with a moustache and whiskers like those of the Emperor of Austria and a distrustful appearance well suited to conspirators. Mr. Brown introduced Eddie as "the gentleman in question." The saddler looked

him up and down with misgiving, but opened the door to a wider extent, letting them enter. He led the way up a staircase to the room above the shop, which was already lighted with gas and prepared for the meeting. The fireplace was piled high with red-hot coals, the window-blind was drawn down, and chairs were set round the deal table in the middle, upon which stood a jug of water and a grimy tumbler to indicate the ceremonial character of the proceedings about to commence. The saddler waved his hand around, and turned and climbed downstairs without saying a word.

"That 's what I call a good host," said the boy.

In spite of his politeness, Mr. Brown had no idea of staying here longer than was necessary. He at once proceeded to a corner of the room, opposite the window, and opened the door of a capacious cupboard revealing what appeared to be the complete stock of furniture that had been used in the room before it became the office of the trade-union, the dissected parts of a bedstead, a mattress, a washing-stand, some crockery, some pictures, some ancient cans, a pile of old clothes, and several chairs, the whole being enriched by an overpowering smell of paint.

"This, I fear, is the place, Mr. Durwold."

"Does it lock?" asked Eddie.

"I am afraid not. It bolts from the outside."

Exercising some ingenuity they placed one of the chairs so that it provided Eddie with a seat, and also, when he stood upon it, enabled him to peep through the three round holes that were bored for the purpose of ventilation through the wood at the top of the door. For the present he sat, and Mr. Brown, with cordial but briefly expressed wishes for his success, shut the door and left him.

39

The committee was due to meet at nine o'clock. Left in the cupboard with ten minutes to wait before the fateful

hour Eddie's first impulse was to smoke a cigarette. He lit one, smoked it for a few moments, and then put it out. It had struck him that the smell of smoke might lead to his detection. His education was making good progress.

He was very uncomfortable. The smell of paint was disgusting. His position was cramped. One of the legs of the bedstead pressed against his ribs, as he sat, and when he tried to shift it he nearly caused an avalanche of chairs and boxes and other rubbish to fall on his head from above. He had to desist, and bear the discomfort. His only luxury was the light which shone through the ventilating holes and made his cell quite cheerful as soon as his eyes accommodated themselves to the standard of illumination.

Left alone with his thoughts he was unable to deny that Providence had dealt justly with him. He would have to make payment in the form of a crisis at Maryhill to-morrow, but he had received good measure in exchange. The adventure of last night had been pleasant; the events of to-day had been charming, while the experience of the moment was delicious. To avoid the leg of the bedstead he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, in which position he shook and shivered with joy. It had amused him to disarm the whole dynasty of Mrs. Hope's spies at Maryhill, at a pleasant risk of punishment, with a head as cool as a cucumber and every circumstance comic. On many a night he had chuckled and wriggled in his bed to think of that. But to engage in nocturnal conflict with that portentous joke, that scourge of youth, that jewel of the age, that ornament of womankind, that oracle, that pinnacle, Miss Baker, was a new rung in the ladder of adventure, a new altitude of humour. It was particularly jolly that she should be spied upon by one on whom she had spied.

But presently there occurred to him a further thought that somewhat damped the glow of his amusement until he

grew used to it. Had he not been wrapped in youthful innocence it might have entered his head before. He remembered that it was not only upon Miss Baker that he was a spy. It was not only against her that his hostile act was directed. It was also against the strike committee of the Denbury Potters' Union.

Though not a great reader of the newspapers Eddie had received a fair smoking-room education from the mouths of his elders. He knew that the forces of Labour, though they may be hated, are not usually made fun of. One may laugh at the House of Commons, but not at a trade-union. One may play a practical joke upon a bishop, but not on a Labour leader. So Eddie realised that in so far as he had been sent to spy upon the strike committee, he was committed to a venture of a most uncommon and formidable description. He was doing what he had never heard of any one doing before. He was tweaking the most sacrosanct of all the noses in the land.

The red spectre of Socialism seemed suddenly alarming. To Eddie in the cupboard it changed from a topic in the newspapers to a reality that might presently open the door and discover him. He pictured to himself a dozen burly men, directed by the justly incensed Miss Baker, and not at all disposed to say "Sir" to him, as Mr. Brown did. They would resemble the typical British Workman in the cartoons, virtuous and honest but grim and heavy-handed. He wondered what they would do to him. In for a penny, in for a pound, however. Chairs, boxes, crockery, pictures, bedstead, all should be thrown at them before they laid hands on him, for Eddie had gone so far in defiance of various authorities that he could not now turn back with self-respect even from Socialism itself.

A step sounded on the stairs. In the distance the church clock began to strike nine. The steps entered the room. With the utmost caution Eddie scrambled to the seat of

his chair and looked through the peep-hole to see who had come in. It was a curate.

40

The curate was a very tall and gentlemanly man who stooped somewhat and wore spectacles so powerful that they distorted the appearance of his eyes. Finding himself alone in the room he put his hands behind his back and walked up and down between the window and the door of Eddie's cupboard, wrapped in meditation. Though a handsome, scholarly, and earnest looking man, his face was not pleasing in all respects. It lacked the complete frankness of expression which is generally seen in people of the nicest nature. At any rate, the curate looked as if he had something at the back of his mind which he did not intend to communicate to any one. You could very well picture him receiving confessions, but not making them.

Having expected to see a full-blooded, socialistic working man Eddie was half inclined to think that there had been a mistake, when the curate entered, and that this was not Miss Baker's meeting at all. He knew that Miss Baker was an atheist and would not have supposed that a curate, even one whose face he did not like, would have associated with her. Still more was he surprised when the sound of other footsteps on the stairs resulted in the entrance of a small lady in green serge, fair, flat-featured, over forty, and unself-conscious in manner, who shook the curate by the hand and roundly reproached him for not having attended the last two meetings of the Browning Society. The curate readily admitted what it was clearly useless to deny, but Eddie was the more puzzled. Even when they fell to talking of the strike, he could not be sure that he should regard them as strike leaders. "It was bound to come," said the lady, speaking of Bobby's doings of this

day; "I have never known six months' enthusiastic work not bring its reward, and I don't know how or why, but I knew it was bound to come." The curate fully agreed that they could heartily congratulate themselves upon Sir Robert's attitude.

"Ah, Mr. Gate," said the lady, "socialism *will tell.*"

"If you would call it the social spirit of God," replied the curate rather unwillingly, with averted eyes, "I should agree. Well, it is only a question of words, is it not?"

At this point they were joined by a third person, who resembled more nearly, yet not completely, what Eddie had been expecting. He was a chemist's assistant of some five and twenty years of age, with long sleek hair, bright eyes, and a red tie. "That young man," said Eddie to himself, "has got consumption." He had got enthusiasm, without doubt, for the sight of his two colleagues made his eyes blaze and he was clearly about to burst into flames of eloquence when checked by something chilly in the curate's manner as they shook hands. All he actually said was, "So we have triumphed, Mr. Gate."

Next came a stout elderly man with grey whiskers of reverend length who wore a black frock-coat ornamented with the badge of the Liberal Hundred of Denbury. He was a watchmaker. Though breathless after climbing the staircase he shook hands gravely with all present and offered each of them his congratulations on the successful issue of the strike. He then drew the curate into the corner by Eddie's cupboard and confessed his willingness to become a candidate for the Town Council at the next election, an undertaking for which his labours on the strike committee would perhaps make him more fitted than another. Meanwhile the meeting was enlarged by the arrival of a member whose narrow brow and joyless, spectacled eyes assured Eddie that he was a schoolmaster. He was followed by another recognisable authoritarian of

middle-class extraction, a square built and very keen-eyed man, who, when he was not directing strikes, was an Inspector for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. A moment later came the party from the Vicarage, Mr. Trevanion, Mrs. Trevanion, and Miss Baker, and also Mrs. Hope and Miss Agg, whose presence in Denbury was known to Eddie through the unlucky Miss Latona. They entered in the reverse order to that in which their names are stated. This completed the list of those who were to come, except that in the wake of the vicar there followed a couple of working men who stood waiting, cap in hand, for their presence to be recognised.

41

It was not what Eddie had expected, nor did it alarm him in the least. Such was his moral nature that he would have feared discovery by a dozen real working men who could have blacked his eyes and beaten him far more than he feared discovery by a couple of clergymen, a schoolmaster, two tradesmen, and five women, in spite of the spiritual terrors they might have at command. To do him justice, by as much as his fears were abated, his interest waned. He crept down to a sitting position on his chair, and was soon profoundly bored.

Others might have been bored, also, by the proceedings of the committee, which were long, and not sensational. There was first a period of mutual congratulation upon the undeniable fact that Bobby Wilton was proving more conciliatory than the former owner of Underbell's. Every one congratulated the two working men, in the kindest way, and also Miss Baker, who received her share of public recognition without much enthusiasm. She was in a very surly mood. The vicar, on the contrary, was as cheerful as he was efficient. When he had called the meeting to order

he made an opening statement, from the chair, in the course of which he said that this might be the last meeting of the strike committee. There was every reason to believe that they had won a remarkable victory, and that Sir Robert Wilton's concessions would be all they could desire. He himself had seen Sir Robert Wilton that afternoon and was confident that he had fully recognised the entire justice of the people's claims. The committee, therefore, might congratulate itself. Small as was their area of work, they had made a stand for justice and enlightenment, and all the country would hear of their success. He wished particularly to mention his sister-in-law, Mrs. Hope, who had been instrumental in bringing her friend Miss Baker to the help of the men of Denbury. Without Miss Baker's brilliant abilities they could of course have achieved nothing. But without Mrs. Hope's practical sympathy they would never have met Miss Baker. Again, without the devotion and enthusiasm which one and all had shown in the guidance of their brethren of the working class it was certain that they would never have won their present splendid triumph over the forces of capitalism and feudalism. In this connection he made special references to the chemist's assistant, the schoolmaster, and the inspector. Also he acknowledged the help of the watchmaker, a sound old Liberal, who had not feared to join in the unselfish work of those who marched under a more advanced banner. He ended by proving clearly that all results were wholly due to the influence of that committee as officially representing and speaking for the forces of organised Labour, a fact which he was sure the working men themselves would never forget. Thereupon the two working men present arose, one after the other, and echoed his assurance at some length. The chemist's assistant followed usefully with a heated warning to all other employers to learn wisdom from the collapse of Sir Robert Wilton, after which the watch-

maker arose to state in tones that trembled with emotion that their success was very largely due to the help of a Higher Power, and that he personally would be willing in the public interest to stand as a candidate for the Town Council at the next election. The schoolmaster then passionately reminded them that having emancipated the populace they must proceed to cultivate its intellect. After this, in an atmosphere now highly charged with earnest feeling, Mrs. Hope observed that if God had softened Sir Robert Wilton's heart and if the young man was going to show, as it seemed he was, real love for the poor, they ought all to co-operate and give him the benefit of their experience by showing him how much sin and wickedness there was in Denbury that ought to be rooted out and removed, since it could not be denied that this very night he was bestowing his charity upon many who ought not to be the recipients of charity until they had repented and changed their habits. When Mrs. Hope sat down after a grave but far from gloomy speech upon this subject, no one rose to follow her. Then it was that an awkward thing happened, for Miss Baker, in the interval, still gazing moodily at Mrs. Hope, remarked with perfect coolness, "You incorrigible fool!"

They were the only words she spoke, from first to last. Of course Mrs. Hope made no reply. She flushed, but collected herself and looked grieved, and Mr. Trevanion immediately took charge of the proceedings and informed the meeting that there was business of a financial nature to transact. Thenceforward, during three-quarters of an hour, the week's receipts and outgoings of the strike fund were stated and discussed. Mr. Trevanion was a great master of figures. He made this branch of the subject appear quite as satisfactory as the concessions wrung from Bobby Wilton. When it was finished, he began what he called his closing remarks. They came to this: that he, as having been chair-

man of the strike committee, would continue to watch the situation in the interests of justice, but he thought it inadvisable that the committee should meet again unless summoned by himself or Miss Baker, or that it should attempt any further negotiations with Sir Robert Wilton after the surrender he had made. He did not think that their further intercourse with Sir Robert at this time would accord with the dignity of Labour. He fully and cordially agreed with almost all that every speaker had said that evening but he advised the committee now to be contented with its laurels, and so declared the meeting at an end.

The vicarage party left at once, all but Miss Baker, who said she would follow in a moment. She stood gazing into the fire. One or two of the others remained talking, still in a congratulatory vein, the young chemist chanting a shrill pæan upon the ignominy of poor Bobby's defeat. But the others, who were older men, were not very eager to hear him, after a while, and took themselves off, not without exchanging some glances that indicated the inadvisability of saying good-night to Miss Baker in her present mood. Last of all the chemist would have gone too, but Miss Baker turned and called him. They were alone.

"And are you deceived too?" she asked.

"Deceived?" said he.

"You, the anarchist, are you deceived?" she repeated.

She set her fierce eyes on his pale excited face, as she spoke, and cooled his enthusiasm by a single inflection of contempt.

"But isn't it true?" he asked.

"It is true," she answered, "that Wilton has done all this, but it is not true that he did it to please the committee, my friend. Do you mean to say you couldn't see through the vicar's lies? Why, Wilton himself kicked the vicar out of the White Hart this afternoon, and all that he has done he has done over our heads. I have no idea what his con-

cessions are, any more than the vicar has, but I know that they were no more extorted out of him than you extort the bullet out of a rifle after some one has pulled the trigger. Wilton has gone straight to the men and brushed aside the Organisation as though it was a cobweb."

The chemist was appalled.

"But he had no right!" he said.

"Perhaps not, but he has had the power. And where is it to end, my friend? The people are scum, as you know very well, and if they are led by men like Wilton, they will not be led by you and me. Kindly imagine what would happen if other employers followed his example. And what does the vicar care? Trust him to be on the winning side. So will they all, I suppose, but I called you back because I have a sort of half belief in you. Don't imagine it matters to me. I can go back to London. I 'm beaten here and I can go back to other work. Oh, I shall survive it. At the same time, Mr. Meddin, I could crush Wilton if I chose. I could publish a scandalous indecent story that I know of, quite enough to make him stink in the nostrils of these fools who are eating his food to-night. Well, my friend, shall I do it?"

"Good God," exclaimed the chemist, not shocked by the last suggestion but by the gloomy words that preceded it.

"I could hardly tell that to these saintly souls this evening," Miss Baker continued. "But you, and one or two of the others, you might work the thing up if I start it. Who cares? I don't. But it might serve your purpose if you want to set your foot on his neck instead of his on yours. You can take your choice."

"What is the story?" he asked.

"Never mind," said she.

"Good God!" he cried. "I see the whole thing now. Oh, yes, you must do it. We must crush him. He is bribing

the people with this cursed food. Oh, the cowardly, mean, cursed——"

It was the beginning of an oration. Miss Baker cut it short. She hated rhetoric in private.

"Unless you are sensible I shall have nothing to do with it," she said. "I am going back to the vicarage. You can come with me, if you like, but I am not going to listen to ravings. Come along."

Two minutes after their departure Eddie Durwold emerged from his prison, stretched his legs and arms, lit a cigarette, and indulged in some reflections that are not worth recording. Boys of his sort, if their good fortune gives them an inch, will take an ell. Eddie had had his inch in the fact that he had not been discovered in the cupboard. Half of his cigarette was smoked before his genius suggested the ell.

He went to the cupboard and kicked its contents hither and thither until he found the pot of paint that had so long offended his nostrils while he had been spying. The pot was three-quarters empty, but the paint was a bright red, and a paint-brush stood in it. He took it, and went on his way. He left the house. Faithful to his word he visited Mr. Hammick and Mr. Brown at the Sun, and briefly narrated his adventures. Then he returned to the White Hart. It was past eleven o'clock. Dick Trevor was waiting for him, with news that Bobby was in bed. Carrying his paint pot, and a candle, Eddie went upstairs. He found Bobby asleep, and was careful not to wake him. He put his candle on the floor. He sat on his bed, aged sixteen, and watched the innocent sleep of twenty-seven in the bed opposite, and reflected that Miss Baker had been the cause, truly, undeniably, and wilfully, of punishments that had descended on himself at Maryhill. So he neither shrank from his intention nor grudged the vigil that it demanded. Twelve o'clock struck, from the church tower,

and half-past twelve. That was the time he had fixed upon. He picked up his paint pot and crept out of the room. In the art of noiseless locomotion he was skilful. He stole downstairs, into the coffee-room, where he opened a window and looked out into the square. No one was to be seen. He climbed out, looked about him, and walked over to the big brown wooden doors of the Town Hall. Here, solemnly, slowly, carefully, with all his faculties bent to the one purpose, he painted upon the doors in big capital letters, as follows:

I HAVE OVERHEARD MISS BAKER AND A MR. MEDDIN ARRANGING TO INVENT AN INDECENT SCANDAL ABOUT SIR ROBERT WILTON BECAUSE HE FED THE STRIKERS AND GRANTED THEIR CLAIMS WITHOUT ASKING HER ADVICE.

SIGNED BY ME
C. E. M. DURWOLD
C/O REV. G. ROBINSON
MARYHILL SCHOOL.

Dec. 17, 1911.

In the darkness of night he could barely see what he had written, but he struck matches, and knew that the light of day would prove his workmanship to be good. Then, taking the paint pot, he returned to the hotel, to the bedroom, and undressed, and fell asleep before he knew that he was sleepy.

42

That which Durwold painted on the doors of the Town Hall was the most potent of the causes that led to the foundation of the new league for bringing about peace and good will among all classes of the community and preventing the recurrence of strikes like that which had just ended. It was Mrs. Hope's idea, "and I think," she

said, "that it would be most appropriate, and very nice, and not at all really irreverent, if we were to call it the Society of Jesus."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Agg, "that 's the name of the Jesuits."

Mrs. Hope was much shocked by this news, and rather surprised, and eventually they decided that the name should be as originally suggested, *Social Peace League*. "And I really do think," said Mrs. Hope, "though I know it seems very surprising, that it would be only right and just and fair if we offered Sir Robert Wilton a prominent place on the committee."

This magnanimity must be explained. As has been hinted, Mrs. Hope had been much upset when she learned by the letter she received at Maryhill that Miss Baker proposed to have Bobby lynched by the people. Little reason as she had for wishing Bobby well, she could not approve of this criminal method of punishing him. She knew the right punishment for him, and it was, if only people could be found to do it, a course of kind but grieved glances from all the good and pure whom he met on his daily round. Anything like a violent assault upon him would be as un-Christian in her opinion as it would be criminal in the opinion of the law. So Mrs. Hope, representing Christianity, and the unhappy Mr. Hope in his quality of law-abiding citizen, with Miss Agg to fetch and carry, had hastened to Denbury to avert the mischief. They found Miss Baker much less bellicose than they had feared, pooh-poohing the idea of violence and surprised at their reading her letter with such a literal eye.

On the afternoon of the next day, Saturday, came the astonishing news of the softening of Bobby's heart and the unbuttoning of his pockets, and the reported settlement of the strike by his gamekeeper. The sensation was shortly followed by another of equal magnitude when Mrs. Hope

at the meeting of the strike committee heard herself called by Miss Baker "an incorrigible fool." By a strange coincidence, therefore, she was driven almost simultaneously to regard Bobby as less wicked and Miss Baker as less noble than she had ever before supposed.

Nor was this all. Further and greater surprises of the same character followed quickly to confirm the change of her opinions. Bobby, who believed in God as he believed in the equator, and held that atheists were obnoxious cranks while dissenters were snivelling hypocrites, was a member of the Church of England for which his family had given their blood and their money in the past. He expected the rector of Coulscombe to obey him in things temporal and was willing, to a remarkable degree, to obey the rector in things spiritual. He went to Church every Sunday morning, with military regularity, and once a fortnight he went at eight o'clock to the Holy Communion. When he was not at Coulscombe, he seldom went inside a place of worship. As for Denbury it was not Coulscombe, yet it was not like London or any other place where he had no standing or commitments. It was Marian's town. Bobby, therefore, waking soon after seven o'clock on the morning after he had fed the strikers and settled the strike, went off to have a bath, and remembered, in his bath, that it was Sunday. It seemed to him necessary when he had considered the matter, that he should go to church. He went back to his bedroom, where Durwold lay sleeping with his limbs tossed about in a manner that suggested a complete exhaustion. He dressed, and heard the church bells, and went out to the eight o'clock service in the Parish Church which was not hard for him to find without asking his way.

It was a very great surprise indeed to Mrs. Hope to see him there. She was, at first, sincerely shocked. It seemed to be a sort of profanation, as if a dog had come into the

church, or a pig, or a peacock, or a Punch and Judy show. Then, on further consideration, she came to see how wicked and narrow were her thoughts. Had she not herself said yesterday that God had softened Sir Robert Wilton's heart? She had. And what more natural than that the first yearnings of that softened heart should bring him to a church? Should she not rejoice over him more than over ninety and nine just persons? Evidently, and she rejoiced indeed so heartily that in a few moments she felt quite sure that it was not so much Heaven as herself that had softened his hard heart. It must have been something in her manner that day when he called upon her at Maryhill. It was perhaps her example. Or it might have been her silent influence. Or possibly it was the letter she had written him, weeks ago, asking for a subscription to the strike fund, into which letter, as into all she wrote, she had instilled a certain grave sweetness. Whatever it had been, the result was truly satisfactory. She had not a doubt but that Bobby would now follow the beaten track of all the penitent sinners and reclaimed drunkards and wearied adulterers and reformed criminals that ever she had known, and would become, in all respects, *plus royaliste que le roi.*

She was in a very beautiful mood, and even before she left the sacred edifice she had caught the first glimpse of the grand possibilities of the Social Peace League. As she walked back to the vicarage, which was distant half a mile from the church, she turned the matter in her mind, and felt more and more sure that God would be almost certain to bless a league with a name like that. She was thinking it over, when, as she passed by the doors of the Town Hall she observed a small crowd of people. They were gazing at some big red writing on the door. She drew near, and read the writing for herself.

In an instant she knew that the accusation was justly brought. It was what she had dreaded, for years; it was

what had haunted her throughout her long devotion to Miss Baker; it was a judgment sent by Heaven to punish her love and admiration of that atheist. She had sinned also in the pride with which she enjoyed the friendship of the woman of genius, and Heaven, with characteristic appropriateness, had miraculously chosen Durwold, one of the worst and lowest of mankind, to bring her to her senses. As to the facts about Miss Baker, there was no doubting the dreadful truth. Mrs. Hope had evidence. She had the letter in which Miss Baker had written of having Bobby hanged. Now if on Thursday Miss Baker had been willing to contemplate murder, there was little doubt that on Saturday she might have contemplated telling lies about him. And there was even better proof of her evil disposition. Mrs. Hope could hardly forget that at the meeting last night she had called her an incorrigible fool. No truly good woman could have used such words. No truly good woman could have even dreamed of using such words to one who tried to do right and good as sincerely as Mrs. Hope did. In fact, the more Mrs. Hope thought of it, the more she was sure that such words could never pass the lips of Sir Robert Wilton, for instance, whose beautiful and thoughtful face she had seen in church, while his softened heart beat under a hand-knitted waistcoat of dark blue, not at all loud or horsey. True, he had said something very unpleasant when he called on her at Maryhill. And he had taken Bessie from the Home. But both those things happened before his heart was softened, and you could not expect him to have been the same before he was softened as he had since come to be, or, of course, there would have been no need for the softening and nothing wonderful in his being softened. As far as the present time was concerned, there was no doubt about it; Sir Robert Wilton would never call her an incorrigible fool. And that was exactly what Miss Baker *had* called her.

Mrs. Hope looked very sweet and sad when she sat at breakfast that morning with the Trevanions, Miss Baker, Miss Agg, and the Trevanions' three children, and her own poor husband who longed to return to Maryhill and his theological writings. But it was strange to see how quickly Mrs. Hope's sweetness waxed and her sadness waned. She could hardly remember a single occasion on which she had felt more truly happy than she felt now. She forgave Miss Baker, of course, for calling her a fool. She forgave her for everything, and felt a deep pity for her. She said a number of kind and gentle things to her, and when Miss Baker replied in surly tones she pitied with an ever-growing enthusiasm. She felt more and more sure that the truest charity would be to lose no time in telling Miss Baker firmly, but very kindly, that their intercourse must be considered at an end.

All was explained to Miss Agg after breakfast, and Mrs. Hope took particular pains to make it perfectly clear and logical in sequence. She told how Miss Baker had called her a shocking name last night not six hours after Sir Robert Wilton had been softened into feeding the poor strikers in this England of ours in which peace was needed more than anything else. From this she proceeded to show that it never could be truly right or really wise to work with an atheist, while it was practically certain that if they were to start a new league of peace and good will the bishop of the diocese would consent to become its patron. In the next place she drove home the absolute certainty of the softening of Sir Robert Wilton's heart, since he had come to the eight o'clock service, while the Duchess of Brackenbury would be quite as likely as the bishop to take an interest in the new league aforesaid. All this was music in Miss Agg's ears, for whatever promised to bestow a new league on the world needed no further recommendation with her. It was like converting a child to an interest in chocolate

creams. It was like converting a jockey to an interest in racing, and Mrs. Hope felt more truly beautiful and happy than ever as the first recruit of social peace grew ardent and radiant before her. She was only proposing to point out how easily the strike subscriptions could be transferred to the newer and higher cause, and how extremely probable it was that Sir Robert Wilton would accept the presidency of the new league, and how Heaven's blessing was practically certain, and how Miss Baker had plotted some slander against Sir Robert, and how the Duchess would certainly be a patroness, and how the truest kindness to Miss Baker would be an immediate break, when they were interrupted by Mrs. Trevanion who appeared to be greatly disturbed in mind. "Joan," she said, "do please come to the hall door. There is a man waiting to see Miss Baker, and I find she has locked herself in her room, and she won't open the door, and the man won't go away, and he is one of the roughest men I ever saw, and his name is Blood!"

The suggestion in the name was irresistible. Not physically afraid, but morally appalled, the two ladies rose to investigate these first consequences of the crimes of their late colleague. But just as they were following Mrs. Trevanion towards the door, Mr. Trevanion himself burst into the room.

"What 's this I hear about Miss Baker?" he exclaimed. "She has locked herself in her room. Do you know that the Mayor and half the Corporation are waiting in my study to accuse her of I don't know what?"

"If you please, sir," said a calm voice behind him, "a motor-car has come from Didbury Junction to take Miss Baker to catch the train."

"Mr. Trevanion," cried another voice, a man's voice, as shrill as the maidservant's was soft, "she must not go till she has made an explanation. She must give a denial or make an explanation, I say, she must, she must!"

"It is the Mayor," cried Mrs. Trevanion in tragic tones, while the eyes of Mrs. Hope, directed to another quarter of the hall, grew wide with more substantial alarm. "Maud! Agatha! Reginald!" she exclaimed, "she is coming downstairs!"

No need to ask who. The need was for an effort, a bracing of nerves, a supreme resolution. The Mayor of Denbury was one of the least important mayors in England, but he could not let the door of his Town Hall go wholly unavenged. After what had happened he was simply bound to make some moderate commotion. Mr. Trevanion, from more exalted motives, felt compelled to dissociate himself before these witnesses from the colleague who seemed likely to prove discreditable. Last, but not least, we know that Mrs. Hope was inspired to action by a cause as lofty as any on the earth. "Madam—" began the Mayor. "Miss Baker—" cried the vicar, speaking with more stern authority. "Florence—" said Mrs. Hope, with a power of gentle reproach that might have stayed the Gadarene swine. Last of all the rough man on the door-step said, "Look here!"

There could be no doubt that Miss Baker had had news of the writing on the door, for her face betrayed her. Passing on her way she gave the Mayor a glance such as one bestows on a pillar-box at a street corner; at the vicar she glanced with a shade of scorn; at Mrs. Hope she did not condescend to look at all. As for the rough man, since he stood on the door-step demanding to be heard and threatening to block her way, she pushed him lightly over the parapet into the basement, and so passed on to her car. For a woman who feared ridicule far more than she feared the police, her departure was managed with success.

43

While Mrs. Hope in the vicarage drawing-room was expounding to Miss Agg the wonderful things that could be

wrought on earth by peace and good will upon Christian lines, Bobby Wilton in the coffee-room at the White Hart was explaining to Eddie the supreme virtue of minding one's own business. His arguments were quite as effective as Mrs. Hope's, though they were less lofty. There was a riding-whip on the mantelpiece, which he used from time to time as an aid to gesticulation. During ten good minutes it seemed uncertain whether the final gesture would not be the laying of this whip across Eddie's back. "First I have forty minutes' hard labour," said Bobby, "to stop the Mayor putting you in the lock-up, and next you make me look a fool before this whole confounded town. I had settled to go back home this morning, and I suppose you realise that the result of your blasted interference is that they will all say I am running away from Miss Baker's stories. I suppose I oughtn't to care, but I do care."

Eddie ceased not to express an abject remorse, but, though he could apologise, he could not console. Bobby was deeply unhappy. When Dick Trevor came to tell him that it was time to start for the down train at Didbury Junction, for the Denbury branch had no trains on Sundays, he threw down two sovereigns on the table in front of the schoolboy. "Your fare back to Maryhill," he said, and left the room with no other word of parting.

Through the window, a few minutes later, Eddie saw him mount his horse. He was clearly in no better temper, for he leaped into the saddle and kicked back his heels and was off at a canter before his hands had found the reins and before the boy at the horse's head was aware of his own danger. This feat, like his temper and everything else about him, made Eddie sorry to have lost Bobby's friendship.

Forty minutes later he himself set out to catch the London train. Delayed by the necessity of posing for his photograph on a restive horse before Mr. Hammick whom

he met in the square, he had to use his best efforts, or to endure the best efforts of an all too willing steed, in order to reach the junction within his time. He was no great horseman. Hot and weak and weary he dismounted at the station and called good-bye to Tom Trevor who was with him. He had just time enough to fling himself into a carriage, as the train was moving, and he lay back, not very cheerful, thinking, "Thus ends my blooming adventure!" Had he drilled a hole through the cushion against which he leaned, and through the partition, and through the cushion on the other side, he would have found, not ten inches from his own head the head of Miss Baker thinking much as he thought himself. He gazed through the window and took stock of his situation.

"When I get back to Maryhill, I shall have trouble," he thought.

"When I get back to London, I shall be laughed at," thought the head in the next compartment.

"And Bobby is annoyed with me," thought the boy; "he won't invite me for Christmas."

"And Wilton, he has triumphed," thought the genius. "It is his hour."

"Who cares?" thought the one.

"Who cares?" thought the other.

"I will write and tell him I am sorry."

"Besides, I could still crush him if I liked."

"He is a good fellow, and he 'll forgive me," thought Eddie, as they came to the next station. "Who cares for a swishing?"

"After all, life has other interests," thought Miss Baker. "Who cares for a rebuff?"

And who was caring, we may ask, for the many souls at Denbury, the strikers of yesterday, the paupers of to-day, who would not earn money when they could and could not now that they would? Not Miss Baker; she hardly cared

even for vengeance since the red paint at the Town Hall had labelled her a sensational ass. Not Durwold, for he was never a philanthropist. Not the Social Peace League, for it was merely embryonic as yet. There was Bobby, indeed, who had left Michael with orders to pay some sort of a cash allowance to the hands of Messrs. Underbell until the situation should become more clear. But Bobby was not giving what is called personal service. He was hurrying as fast as the train could take him, away from the horrid sensationalism of Denbury and back to his house, his wife, his servant and his maid, his ox and his ass, and everything that was his.

44

Twenty-one years before this time, when Bobby was spending upon frogs and dormice the feelings he spent afterwards upon his horses and his tenants, when Mrs. Hope was chasing her last butterflies, unconscious of her dreadful future, when Miss Baker was still reading the poets and dreaming of marriage with some future Tennyson or Gladstone, the neighbourhood of Denbury was visited with a terrible epidemic of diphtheria. It fell with special virulence upon the village of High Ridge, three miles to the west of the town. It carried off the sixteenth Lord Torrenden of High Ridge Castle, his younger son, his daughter, several of his servants, and nearly a quarter of the population of the village.

One of those who lived through this time of affliction was Matt Blood, a son of Lord Torrenden's bailiff. He survived, but the destroying angel took a toll from him. His father, his mother, and his sweetheart, died within a single week.

He was seventeen years old. Dreadful as his share of the calamities had been, there were not lacking some who

hinted that he had deserved them because he was a bad young man. But he was not really a bad young man at this date. He was only a potentially bad young man whose moral nature was sure to vary with his environment. Left to himself in misfortune he was likely to become bad, but under a proper discipline he was likely to sow no more than a reasonable crop of wild oats.

Fortunately for Matt's prospects the discipline, as it seemed, was ready to hand. Fortunately for his chances of a livelihood, also, after the ruin of his home, there was every appearance of his finding good employment at once. Though death had robbed him of his home and happiness he had no doubt, after the first shock of misery was past, that the Torrenden family would do something to secure his worldly position. He did not reason out this expectation, for it came as naturally as a child's trust in the protection of its parents. Born and bred amid genuinely feudal surroundings he supposed that the new Lord Torrenden would either confirm him in the post he had held, informally, under his father, or would in some way provide him with the means of earning his living. This hope seemed so natural that its realisation would not even have aroused Matt's gratitude.

To explain the intensity of the shock he was to receive, it should be said that Matt regarded the Torrendens less as a group of human beings than as an institution. He had no enthusiastic love for them, and if he admired them individually it was not because they were rich and powerful but because they were magnificent to behold and skilful and daring in all manly exercises. He did not know anything about their being good landlords, because he had no standard with which to compare them. He could compare them only with themselves. It was not as good landlords that he respected them, but as an existing institution. He feared them, too, and could not have gone counter to their

wishes. Lastly he believed blindly that they would always act as they had always acted, which means, in a word, that he trusted them.

All these feelings, trust, fear, respect, and admiration above all, he entertained in regard to Hugh Torrenden the new lord, who was then about thirty years of age. In the course of his work about the estate Matt had watched this all too splendid young man with the worshipping eyes of a boy, and when he took orders from him it was with something more than his usual cheery brisk good will. Lately he had held his gun out shooting. Deep in his heart he had the belief that Hugh Torrenden liked him because he was the quickest boy about the place. But even without this special cause of confidence he would have had no doubt that work and a living would be found for him.

The blow fell about six weeks after the death of Matt's father and the old lord. The new lord had been away from home during most of the time. Matt remained in his father's house, waiting for instructions. He relieved his loneliness and idleness by going to the public house in the evenings, and there it was that he learned that the old lord had died worth a hundred thousand pounds less than nothing, that the new lord was overwhelmed with debts of his own, and that High Ridge was sold to a stranger.

He was slow in realising what this meant for himself, so great was the sheer shock of seeing the mighty brought low. He had wild thoughts, when drunk, of selling his own small possessions and sending the money to Hugh Torrenden. But he lacked the effrontery when sober. Nor could he realise, except at moments, that the facts were as they were. He could not in the least imagine High Ridge without the Torrenden family. When he came near the end of the money that his father had left in his cash box, however, he was forced to consider what his future was

to be. And then, in a manner that aroused the greatest and most lasting emotion of his life, from the midst of his own ruin, Hugh Torrenden came to his help. He did not come in person; indeed he was never seen in High Ridge again. But he sent Matt a letter that he was to show to the new owner of the castle, recommending him for employment in terms of peculiar praise. Together with this came a letter to tell Matt himself that Hugh Torrenden was sorry he could do no more for him, and that he was sending him a present for the sake of old times. The present came in a parcel by the same post. It was a small gold flask. A crest was engraved on it, and two Latin words that Matt did not understand, and two English words that he understood very well, the names of the last of the race of Torrenden of High Ridge.

45

The new lord of the castle was a company promoter of the name of Bristow. All sorts of changes took place at once, and all of them, somehow, involved paint. The external woodwork of the castle was repainted; so were all the cottages in the village. The park palings were painted green and the wheels of the castle carriages were painted yellow. The lych gate in the churchyard was restored and painted brown and dedicated to Mr. Bristow's deceased parents, while the old wooden cross was dragged out of the vaults and painted white and re-erected on the top of the tower, in memory, as a notice stated, of Mr. Bristow's grandfather. All the park lodges were painted blue, and a particularly bright green was chosen for the Swiss cottages and summer houses and boat houses with which Mr. Bristow filled the gardens and surrounded the lake. Whatever new thing Mr. Bristow introduced earned him the resentment of the villagers; whatever old thing he preserved earned him their contempt.

Matt Blood made use of his letter of recommendation, and was engaged as a footman. He made no small financial success of his post. He was astonished by the magnificence of the tips he received from Mr. Bristow's guests. In one way or another, Mr. Bristow poured money into High Ridge, and the more the people prospered the more thoroughly they despised him. They despised also his daughters who carried soup to the sick. Matt, who had the best chances of investigation, regarded the family with a contempt which became, as the Suffragettes would say, a religion. Had he been as docile as he was handsome and intelligent he might have prospered exceedingly in their service. But he could never cure himself of the habit of comparison. He could not keep from staring at Mr. Bristow's stomach, whiskers, bald head, and spindle legs, and comparing him not with what Lord Torrenden had appeared as he sat in the same chair at dinner but with what Lord Torrenden had appeared when Matt used to see him in the coverts or the hunting field. As for comparing Mr. Bristow's son with Hugh Torrenden, it was too painful for Matt to attempt. He could scarcely bear the sight of him.

A footman of expressive countenance who is always gazing at his master's paunch cannot be suffered long. Mr. Bristow, probably from sheer terror, bore him for a year. Then the end came.

Matt was summoned to the library upstairs, the room in which he had parted from Torrenden, and found Mr. Bristow standing on the hearth-rug with his legs apart, his hands behind his back, and his paunch completely unashamed. "Shut the door and come over here," Mr. Bristow told him.

From the first the proceedings were ceremonious. The Torrendens had never been ceremonious. Their orders to their servants had been always briefly given. But Mr.

Bristow had another manner. "Stand there, Blood," he said, indicating a spot on the carpet. He cleared his throat. He had nerved himself for a row.

"You must understand, Blood," he said, "that when I took possession of this house I was provided with a complete inventory by Mr. Percival, on Lord Torrenden's behalf, showing every article which became my property. In fairness to you I shall be prepared to show you the very page in the inventory which deals with the matter to which I am about to refer. The page contains a list of articles belonging to Mr. Hugh Torrenden, now Lord Torrenden, which I purchased from him together with the house and other articles that had belonged to his father. I have been surprised to find that a large number of the articles on this page have not come to light. Among them was a gold flask. I am sorry to tell you that this gold flask has been found among your possessions in your bedroom. Here it is, with Mr. Torrenden's name and crest upon it. I must ask you, therefore, to account for its being in your possession."

Mr. Bristow ended his oration with a grand air, and displayed the flask in his right hand which had remained hidden behind his person till this moment.

"And my account is, Mr. Bristow, that that flask is mine," said Matt.

Mr. Bristow reddened because he had not been addressed as "Sir," but he was able to enquire with elaborate irony whether it was Matt's practice to have Mr. Torrenden's name engraved on articles that were his.

"You 're accusing me of thieving, I believe," Matt replied, with arms akimbo.

"I am, young man," said Mr. Bristow with growing dignity. "And even were that not the case I should feel bound to dismiss you from my service on account of the insolence of your present manner and language. You must not look to me for a character. I should not be justified;

but I have no intention of prosecuting, and I will, ahem, give you a month's wages and——"

The concession came too late. It could not, indeed, have saved Mr. Bristow from what was coming, for the bad habit of comparison became nothing less than a spasm in Matt's mind as soon as he saw Mr. Bristow flinch before him. He told him that he was a snob, with four qualifying adjectives, knocked him down with a right hand and a left hand blow, one in each eye, picked up his flask, and left the room. As soon as he had changed his clothes he left the house also, and that night he made the whole village merry with the tale of his doings and drunk on the proceeds of his tips.

46

The three Misses Patterman lived with their brother, Dr. Patterman, in one of the nice old houses in Church Street, Denbury. Bertha, the eldest, was the housekeeper. Annie, the second, was clever. Katie, the youngest, was pretty. Annie and Katie could skate and play tennis, but Bertha could not. Bertha and Katie were fond of needlework, but not Annie. Yet Annie and Bertha both worked in the parish, a thing which Katie could not bear. The difference between thing and thing is the beginning of all interest whatsoever; so it is easy to see that the sisters found it useful to have different habits. Each was able to appear interesting at the point where she varied from the others.

These ladies afterwards joined the Social Peace League, but in the year 1900 there was nothing half so important for them to engage upon. Indeed, one of their chief occupations in the early part of that year was to watch the progress of a love affair between Eliza, their cook, and the dare-devil potman at the Rising Sun. Viewed merely as a love affair it was romantic. But viewed as the

love affair of the notorious Matt Blood it was quite too delightfully near the verge of scandal. At last the prolonged sensation bore fruit in the final test question of whether the Misses Patterman would or would not be present at the wedding.

Their doubts were justified. Eliza was indolent, pleasure-loving, and rather coarsely handsome, but she was perfectly respectable. It was hard to think that her marriage with Matt was wise. For he, during all the nine years since he blacked the eyes of Mr. Bristow, had been the worst young fellow in Denbury. The Misses Patterman knew this by means of the information which the two elder sisters obtained as district visitors. They knew, in short, that Matt was a sad drunkard and was apt to get the girls into trouble. What they did not know was that his genius had changed the Rising Sun from a desert to a gold mine. Himself the most popular of men, he conferred popularity on the house. The brilliant potman, everybody's friend, trusting everybody, liking everybody, sanguine, enthusiastic, sympathetic, tender hearted, as invincible at games of skill as indomitable at games of chance, eternally cheerful, quick to hit but quicker to forgive, honest in betting transactions, and malicious in nothing but his hatred of the name of Bristow, had been running through life at a disastrous pace.

Of course the Misses Patterman ended by pocketing their scruples and behaving in the handsomest way. They made the wedding-dress, laid in rice and slippers, and gave five pounds towards the cost of a honeymoon at Weston-super-Mare. They came to church in their best finery, Annie and Katie on foot, and Bertha in a carriage with the bride whom she herself was to give away. They behaved with the utmost cordiality to Matt and his best man. The latter they took to be a gentleman of rank, so reserved was his air yet so exquisite his courtesy, till they learned that

he was a retired butler dating from the *ancien régime* at High Ridge Castle. Matt was looking happy and gallant and handsome, for his powers of recuperation were still excellent and he had dissipated with strong coffee the effects of the last debauch of his bachelor days.

All was ready except the vicar, who was essential to the business in hand, and while they waited they passed the time with small talk reverently whispered in the shade of the sacred place. Bertha showed the butler the tombs of the Lords Torrenden, which he knew better than she, and Annie explained to Matt what a lucky man Eliza's husband would be. So the time passed. Ten minutes passed, and twenty minutes, and at last it was generally agreed that the vicar had simply forgotten about the wedding. Katie was sent to the vicarage to remind him. In a quarter of an hour she returned panting and terrified and so dreadfully distressed that she was evidently unable to decide how or to whom to break her news. She led Bertha aside and whispered in her ear. Bertha called to Annie. One after another, their faces became blank. Then Bertha came and took the bride's hands in hers and told the truth. There could be no wedding to-day. The vicar was dead.

Lamentation availed nothing. The butler decided to catch an early train, and the Misses Patterman offered to take the bride home in the carriage. But the bride, whose dress was not a wedding-dress as the words are understood in Mayfair, but only a red serge coat and skirt, preferred to console herself by going for a walk in the town with Matt.

"Well I never," she said, when they were alone, "I thought 'ow p'r'aps you 'd be drunk but I never thought 'e 'd die. 'Eart, was it?"

"So Miss Annie says," announced the brilliant potman rather absently. "Jus' think if 'is 'eart 'ad took 'im 'arf way through tying the knot."

" 'Ow long would they be getting another, now, I wonder," said Eliza.

"That 's what I 'm thinking."

"Months, p'r'aps."

" 'Um."

"Want a drink, Matt?"

"Drink be damned," he answered. "Waiting months won't suit me. We done our best. Just you go and get your box ready and I 'll bring the Sun trap and we 'll go to Weston by the three-fifteen."

"Yes," said Eliza calmly. "P'r'aps it would be best."

So the ceremony was postponed until, as we shall see, it was performed after the lapse of a dozen years in deference to the prejudices of a young man who was now chiefly occupied in expiating his own irregularities at a public school.

47

The landlord of the Rising Sun had long been jealous of Matt because the success of his house was due to Matt's qualities, and not to his own. He had felt that the occasion of Matt's marriage would be suitable for dismissing him, since a wife would impair his value in several ways, and he wrote to Matt with this information, not very considerately, while the couple were at Weston-super-Mare. Hence the second great hatred which darkened Matt's nature.

"Bristow!" he had been used to say. "No, don't you talk to me of Bristow, or p'r'aps I 'll forget my manners. The first time I set eyes on him I see he 's not fit to call a gentleman; and the last time I see he 's not fit to call a man. He 's paid his bloody money for the castle, and the castle 's his by the law, and a damned bad law and a damned bad man."

And now came the turn of Clark, the landlord of the Rising Sun. "Who made his business for him? Who

brought the chaps in and kep' 'em in and made 'em drink till they was silly? Would they come in the house to see his fishy eyes? He couldn't a-bear it if a chap 'd come five years every night and couldn't pay for his glass one single night, out he 'd go, and curse him too; if I hadn't paid his drink out of my own money he 'd never a-darkened the doors again. I made that trade as sure as I make this cigarette, and Clark he made the money. And I say if all had their rights that money 'd be mine to-day."

The moral was plain. You could not expect to be treated properly unless you were dealing with gentlemen. Matt was in luck, for he met with a gentleman within a week of his return to Denbury. This was a Mr. Dimmock, a barrister, who came on the scene as Conservative candidate for the Denbury division. Matt was engaged as a messenger in the Conservative office, and afterwards as a guide to conduct Mr. Dimmock about the countryside.

He was in high spirits again. Little as he knew about the roads and lanes of Gloucestershire, he got drunk and studied the map and was ever afterwards able to find his way anywhere as soon as the drunken brilliance was reproduced. The pay was good; there was drink for him and ribbons for Eliza. He had always been a good Tory, and since he had heard of the death of Lord Torrenden on a South African battle-field he had become enthusiastic about the war on which the general election of that year was chiefly fought. Above all, he was enthusiastic about Mr. Dimmock. As he told all the world, he knew a gentleman when he saw one. He rejoiced in serving such a man. He had not the faintest doubt that Mr. Dimmock would end by setting him up as a political agent or as a publican in one of the smaller taverns of the town.

At no time in his life had he drunk so much beer as in the last three weeks of the election campaign, and at no time had he worked so hard or so successfully. The sustained

excitement suited him. He was radiant with bliss. For three long weeks he never said a rude word to a Conservative, nor a civil word to a Liberal. He never rested. At every spare moment he canvassed and urged and converted and stood drinks and laid bets with venal voters to induce them to vote his way. As for Mr. Dimmock, he worshipped him as though he were a Torrenden returned to earth; he kicked the very stones off the ground he was to tread, caressed every creature that spoke well of him, fought all who dared abuse him, and wept for joy when the election ended in his victory. Three days later he wrote to ask what Mr. Dimmock would do to help him towards a livelihood in the future. The answer was a formal acknowledgment of his good work, and a postal order for twenty shillings over and above his proper payment. "Take it," he said to Eliza, in the bitterness of his disillusionment; "I will not drink as much as twopence of the money of such a devil."

It was a few days later that he happened to be showing his flask to a man who professed to know Latin. "*Haud Immemor*," said the man, reading the inscription, "do you know what that means?"

"Not I," Matt answered.

"Well," said his informant, "it means something like 'Remember me.'"

"Then it means," said Matt, "remember what doesn't exist. There 's not a gentleman left in England. That I know, and I 'm not making a mistake."

48

It was a poor consolation to Matt to swear that he would work for the Liberals next time. His health broke after the election. He was punished for years of debauchery by a mysterious nervous complaint, so that he could no more

enjoy his drink than he could abstain from it, and he lost the buoyancy that had been the best of Heaven's gifts to him. He was without work, and overwhelmed by the debts he had incurred in making corrupt bets with voters. He had to live on what Eliza could earn as a jobbing cook. Afterwards he tried another place as potman but he found that his genius had left him. He attracted custom no more, and he was replaced by a rival of equal dulness but greater sobriety. At last he drifted into the general sink of labour in Denbury; he became a stoker at Underbell's.

It was a terrible life after the gay years at the Rising Sun. He was overworked and underpaid, repeatedly fined for one fault or another, and much tempted to relieve himself by making a hell for Eliza at home. But the last virtue to cling to him was that which may be called chivalry. He did his best to make a hell for Underbell's, but he spared Eliza. She bore him three children, whereby the financial position was made worse. With the cost of children added to the cost of beer there was not much left for rent and clothing and the amenities of life. And Mr. Bristow still flourished at the castle out of which he had kicked the Torrendens. Mr. Clark still kept the tavern out of which he had kicked Matt. Mr. Dimmock still came occasionally, with a fur coat and a motor-car, to remind the men of Denbury that the cause of property must be defended. Matt was the natural prey of the first Socialist who talked to him.

In the fulness of time Miss Baker came to organise the strike, and Matt was one of those who followed her lead without hesitation. He was now thirty-eight years old. He had served Underbell's for eleven years. He, who would not have murmured against any quantity of cursing or even thrashing from the Torrendens, being loyal and sunny and more apt to forgive than a church-full of ordinary Christians, was now quite ready to throw stones and

break heads. He was embittered against the soulless machine in which he was a cog, for ever revolving on the wheel of labour. He was embittered against the system which gave him bare subsistence in exchange for lifelong drudgery, as the wheel is given oil to keep it running till it perishes and is thrown away. He was a sentient being, but was treated as a piece of metal. He had affections, but the factory repelled them; enthusiasms, but the factory did not need them; aspirations, but the factory crushed them. He was permitted only to slave at the level of starvation that another might have profits. They must abandon hope, all they who enter such places.

Matt liked Miss Baker. Once more, after many years, a firm voice called him to a task which was interesting and splendid, played on his higher feelings, and proclaimed a human personal leadership over him. He entered on the strike with a pale and wintry revival of the zest he had thrown into Mr. Dimmock's election in the days when he was gay and young and gallant.

But the latter campaign had little in common with the former. There was no work, no excitement, no pay but the most wretched, and no glee or buoyancy in Matt himself. As he had been less thrifty than others so he suffered more than others through the strike. He had no savings, no membership in any benefit society, nothing of value to sell or pawn, and no chance of getting credit. Drink still levied a tax on the little he had to live upon. He starved, with Eliza and the children, and starved the more thoroughly as Miss Baker pursued her policy of brewing fury by reducing the strike pay. It was due to the extremity of his distress that Miss Baker took pity on him and employed him, for half-a-crown, to distribute the handbills that dealt with the character of Bobby Wilton.

The afternoon was gloomy, as we have seen. To push leaflets under cottage doors and into the hands of passers-by

is not exhilarating. Such food as Eliza had for Matt she usually gave him at night, and at present he was famished. In the faintness of his body his perception of things was slight. His only blessing was the numbness of his mind. The sound of the hoofs of eight horses, an unusual sound in Denbury, must have entered his ears long before it reached his brain. He was leaning against the wall of a house in South Street when he looked up and saw Bobby and his companions riding along the street quite close to him. Bobby was the nearest, and the plainest to be seen by Matt, whose eyesight was not at its best. He lurched forward into the road and handed one of his bills up to him, and then, as the others drew rein, he went among them and gave bills to all. Then Bobby called him. He obeyed the summons.

"Do these bills come from Miss Baker?" he was asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Are you one of the men on strike?"

"Yes."

"One of Underbell's men?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, for Bobby was staring into Matt's face and Matt was staring into Bobby's. Matt's mind played him a trick. It made him think he had met Bobby before, that something was familiar in his appearance, in the sound of his voice, in his tone of command, in the fearlessness of his expression, and in his very setting among these horses and these men. This was absurd, for the recollection floated up from so distant a past that Bobby would have been a baby at the time.

"Are you hungry?"

The question brought Matt sharply back to the present. But it was a question that his pride would not let him answer. Then said Bobby, "If you will come with me, in a quarter of an hour you shall have a meal."

Matt's feelings were like those of Cinderella before the fairy godmother. Finding it hard to believe that he was not dreaming, he asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Sir Robert Wilton."

Disillusionment again! Matt had actually supposed, at his time of life, after all that he had learned, that he had found another gentleman, that a passing stranger was going to treat him with the fierce kindness of the Torrendens, with the stern protection of the mythical breed of heroes that he had idolised in his foolish youth, and revered still to the extent of keeping a gold flask which would have fetched money. He had been deceived by a touch of manner. He had been deceived into a thrill of liking for the brutal chief of the system he abominated, the owner of the factory, who avowedly cared not if he starved stiff. So he stepped back, and the cavalcade went on its way.

He followed, but with no wish to draw a crowd or make a row. He followed because in spite of his disillusionment he was still fascinated. Sluggish as his mind now was, it had been stirred, and at last he saw the truth. He saw the tragedy of the modern world to be that one who looks like a Torrenden can act worse than a Bristow. More than ever he thanked God that he was a Socialist.

49

The next disillusionment was on a very elaborate scale, being six days in preparation, and utterly heart breaking in its catastrophe. After he had seen Bobby enter the White Hart, Matt went on distributing leaflets until his strength failed him. Then he staggered home and fell asleep on a chair. He woke, and the face of the earth was changed. A fire of coals was blazing in the grate. The savour of stewing meat filled the room. The table was spread with plates and cups, and also with bread, butter,

cheese, milk, jam, and a great dish of cabbage and potato. Matt was speechless, and speechless he remained during a considerable part of that wonderful evening. Eliza, on the other hand, was voluble. She explained that this was Sir Robert Wilton's bounty, that every man at Underbell's was enjoying the same, that the strike was settled, the demands granted, and that her own eyes had beheld Sir Robert Wilton standing in the porch of the White Hart.

The thing was beyond explanation. It was a mystery beyond Eliza's chatter and beyond Matt's half-stunned cogitation. But if the miracle of the day was great, the miracle of the morrow was greater.

Matt had left the house between nine and ten that morning, saying that he would be back for dinner. No wonder, for it was many a day since such a dinner had awaited him. Eliza, whose nature was indolent and easy-going, had accommodated herself to changed conditions. She settled into a matter-of-fact contentment with the full larder and the big fire and the prospect of better times and better wages in the future. She made herself and the children look clean and tidy, darning their clothes and brushing their hair, and when Matt did not return for dinner she concluded that he had preferred to go drinking instead. Yesterday, as she remembered, he had earned half-a-crown over the leaflets.

Shortly after two o'clock a note was brought to Eliza by a girl who said she was from the vicarage. The note dispelled all doubt as to the cause of Matt's absence, but it surprised Eliza, for Matt was very seldom so drunk as to collide with the authorities. "Will Mrs. Blood please come to the vicarage at once," the note read, "on account of her husband who is there." Eliza told the girl that she would come directly. Then she went upstairs and hunted about for the red stuff that she pinned to her hat on state occasions, and for her white cotton gloves and her umbrella

and her brooch. "'E must a-drunk the 'ole 'arf-crown," she thought, "and 'oo stood 'im the rest, I wonder."

She sauntered off to the vicarage, enjoying the fresh air and the sights and sounds of life. "Bless me, things do seem changed," she thought, for the faces of all the people looked cheerful. "'Oo 'd a-thought it this time yesterday. Pity we 'aven't been more churchy; the vicar, p'r'aps 'e 'd a-spoke for Matt before the magistrates. Miss Patterman! Going to Sunday-school, I suppose. Can't think 'ow she wears such 'ats. Let me see, the vicar 's called Trevanion. 'Andsome, 'e is. Styles, Bentley, 'Arrison, Trevanion; 'ow they come and go. There 's the little dog Matt sold to the police, and drunk seven and sixpence off it."

She rang the bell at the vicarage door and told the parlour-maid that she was Mrs. Blood. "Wonders never cease," she thought, when she had been taken to the drawing-room and left alone. "Well, this is a fine room. P'r'aps it 's where Mr. Styles died of 'is 'eart. I 'll sit down. Why shouldn't I? 'Ow this 'at droops! I 'd keep a better fire in the 'earth if I 'd their money. Spend it on their pictures, I suppose. All Bible ones. Bless me, they *are* peculiar. I 'll lean back in this chair. Why shouldn't I? Oh, there goes my 'at!"

While she was correcting the angle of her hat with the aid of a religious picture that served as a mirror, the parlour-maid returned and asked her to come upstairs. Few people could be less addicted than Eliza to the vulgar feeling of astonishment, but her placid mind was decidedly impressed when the parlour-maid, leading her up the staircase and along a passage, threw open the door of a handsomely furnished bedroom and revealed Matt lying in the middle of a large double bed. In this surprising spectacle the only thing which Eliza could understand was the bandage tied round Matt's head. "Well," she said, incredulously, "well I 'm——!"

The parlour-maid shut the door and left them alone.

"'Oose labour creates it?" said Matt. "Who digs the clay? Who stokes the fire?"

"Goodness!" said Eliza, "you look quite silly, Matt."

"Liza, hullo, is that you?" he asked.

"Don't you know me then?"

"He never said such a thing," Matt answered. "Don't you believe it, Liza. Hullo, I 'm talking silly."

"Drunk, are you?" she asked.

"Why, I was asleep," said Matt. "I 'm blowed, Liza, how funny to see you here! Hullo, I 'm going silly again. Wait a bit. I 've got a headache something awful."

" 'Eadache cost more than 'arf-a-crown, I reckon," said Eliza. "You never done this on beer."

"Beer!"

"No, not on beer."

"Beer! Get on! It was Miss Baker."

"Oh, indeed," said Eliza, looking at him as though he were something in a museum. "And what did Miss Baker do, I wonder."

"Knocks me over in the area."

"Oh, indeed."

"Standing on those front steps, I was, and tripped over the side, before my words is out of my mouth."

"And what might your words 'ave been, I wonder."

"Would you have me kep' the 'arf-crown, then?" cried Matt excitedly. "Why, I never thought no more about it, after the goings-on last night, till Rogers come up this morning. 'Your 'arf-crown,' 'e says, 'for 'anding leaflets.' 'Damn lying leaflets, too,' I says. 'The young feller said no such words, or 'e 'd not a-give us our grub last night. Take it back,' I says. 'Take it to Miss Baker,' 'e says. And so I comes here, waiting on the door-step, and out comes Miss Baker and pushes out her arm, and I trips over the scraper and into the area, and knocks my forehead on

the lead piping, and—hullo!" Matt stopped, and Eliza turned her head to see what had attracted his notice.

"Mrs. Blood?" said a strange lady, who had come silently into the room.

"Yes, miss, that 's me," said Eliza.

"Has he told you?"

"I never 'eard the like," said Eliza, with extraordinary tact.

The strange lady came up to Eliza, and took hold of both her hands. The sweetest and gravest of smiles lit her face. "It has all been very wonderful," she said. "But the most wonderful thing of all is that it should have happened to-day of all days, and some day you will know why. All I think I ought to tell you is that we think it really and truly right of your husband to return the ill earned money, and we are going to nurse him and look after him until he is quite well again, as if he were our own brother. I know how sorry we ought to be that the accident should have happened at all, but we cannot be really sorry when we think of social peace because we all feel that this has been sent by God to be the very beginning and first fruits of a new spirit in the whole world. Now you mustn't stay more than five minutes, because the doctor says your husband is not to talk just at present, but you can go away with the feeling that he will be looked after in this house as though he were the dearest of our own family."

"Well, miss, I never 'eard the like, I never did," said Eliza.

Mrs. Hope pressed her hands and smiled again. Then she went and lowered one of the window blinds, and prodded Matt's pillow into a new shape, and poked the fire, and chattered about the fineness of the afternoon, and reminded Eliza that her visit must not last for more than five minutes. She left the room.

"Dotty?" murmured Eliza, who was quite frightened.

" 'Ush," said Matt.

50

It was Wednesday, the third day after Mrs. Hope hit on the idea of social peace, and the fourth day before Christmas. It was the day of the inaugural meeting of the league.

"Just a moment," called Mrs. Trevanion, holding up her hand to command the attention of the fourteen persons who constituted the meeting in the vicarage drawing-room, "just a moment! We will all have tea first, quite informally, and then I shall ask you to listen to a few words from my sister Mrs. Hope about the league."

That the matter may be perfectly clear it should be said that each of the fourteen persons present had received an invitation written and signed by Mrs. Trevanion but dictated by Mrs. Hope. The same statements were made in each letter, and though they were very alluring statements there was not one that was not literally and absolutely true. Mrs. Hope had pointed this out to Mrs. Trevanion very distinctly. Statement One was an invitation to tea, and there could be nothing untrue about an invitation. Statement Two was that they wanted to talk over a little plan for founding a new league, and no one could gainsay the truth of that. Statement Three was that though the league was to begin in Denbury it was likely to spread quickly over all England, for it was just a plan to try whether our sad social troubles could not be settled by a little Christian charity. If you questioned the truth of this, you were doubting the goodness and power of God. Statement Four was that hundreds and hundreds of rich people in the London district were already hoping and praying for a league of this sort, which was certainly true, because they practically prayed it every time they went to church. Statement Five was that Mrs. Trevanion quite hoped that the Duchess of Brackenbury would become

patroness, and why, if Mrs. Trevanion had any hopes of the sort, should she not say that she hoped it quite? Statement Six was that the bishop of the diocese was practically certain to help greatly with the spiritual side while they expected the presidency to be accepted by Sir Robert Wilton until such time as the league was large enough for it to be offered to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Was anything wrong in this? Not if the bishop was a truly good man. Not if Sir Robert was really softened. In fact, there was not a statement in the letter that could not be made by a thoroughly conscientious woman.

Twenty invitations were sent, sixteen ladies accepted, and fourteen actually came. Great things have small beginnings. Mrs. Hope preferred fourteen truly Christian ladies to fourteen hundred of any other sort, and she was perfectly satisfied and happy. There was Mrs. Heatherington-Smith on the sofa, who had worn widow's weeds for thirty years. Beside her was Miss Pinkley, who virtually lived in church. In the other corner of the sofa they had deposited Miss Hornby, who had lost the use of both legs in 1902, and on a stool beside her was Mrs. Pewitt, who was practically deaf but could hear with a trumpet. Into the trumpet shouted Miss Trickey whose plain blue skirt and purple jacket brought home to one how little true goodness has to do with taste or drapery. By the tea table little Lady Budge, the widow of an Indian judge, was sitting almost in the lap of a chemist's daughter and talking with an agitated volubility which was beautiful if you bore in mind the class distinction between them. In the same spirit of love and enthusiasm the two Misses Trotman by the piano, the pretty one with the hump on her back and the tall plain one with the earnest face, were being nice to the wife of Brown, the retired ironmonger, though their own father had been a University man. It seemed as though the spirit of social peace had descended even upon

this first meeting of the league; for there was not a lady present who looked frivolous or worldly and yet not one who was not talking in bright and eager fellowship to some one else. It was just the atmosphere in which Mrs. Hope was likely to make a good speech.

"I am sure we shall all be very sorry," she said, speaking from the hearth-rug, when tea was over, "that the Duchess of Brackenbury has not been able to come here to-day." A murmur of assent proved how well she had gauged their feeling, and Miss Trickey leaned into Mrs. Pewitt's trumpet and shouted a report of the speech up to date. This being inconvenient, however truly kind, Mrs. Pewitt was removed to a chair on the hearth-rug in the nearer vicinity of the speaker, who thus continued. "But I think we may feel that she is practically certain to be our patroness when she really understands about the league, and I am sure I shall not be wrong when I say just the same about Sir Robert Wilton. At any rate, I am sure there is no reason why we should not begin our work at once. I know we are all feeling that Denbury has had a real warning of the dangers of trying to do good without remembering to keep that little lamp of Christian love always burning. We are all very sorry that the vicar is not here with us to-day, because he would have told us in his own words what we are all feeling in our hearts, but we can be sure he is with us in spirit. I was going to tell you a little story about how a millionaire might say to a district visitor that he had given much more in charity than she had, and she might answer, 'Yes, but I have given my life and my love.' I know we are all feeling that life and love is just what needs giving to Denbury now. When you each get your peace cards with the names of the three poor families you will be asked to welcome into true friendship, you will be sure to feel how much more beautiful it is to give love than to give money. I want to tell you that we have had several long talks with Mr. Jones,

who has taken charge of all Sir Robert Wilton's affairs in Denbury, and he sees no objection to our all working together. So we shall help him and he will help us, and I feel quite sure that we shall realise how the most important thing of all for us Christians to remember is that we ought to love one another in all possible ways. And above all, of course, we must give our minds to the question of being true friends with the poor. Now I will tell you our proposals, but first of all, I think, we ought to elect our committee and our officers."

This was done by means of voting papers, which had been typewritten by Mrs. Hope's secretary, so that it was all quite in correct and proper form. For the office of president there had been only one nomination, that of Sir Robert Wilton, and nothing was simpler than to mark a pencil cross in the space opposite his name. The committee was a more complicated matter. Five members were to be elected, and six names appeared upon the voting paper. These were the names, as Mrs. Hope explained, of the six nominated candidates for election, and it was open to all present to mark crosses against the names of any five, exactly as they thought wisest and best. True enough, the scope of choice was rather severely limited, but the plan was copied from that used in the vicar's representative parish council, and it could never be denied that those who were elected had actually been elected. The voting papers were put into a little work-basket lined with pink satin, and were set aside for subsequent counting.

"And the only other thing we have to do before we finish the elections," said Mrs. Hope, "is to choose a man and woman to be caretakers in the Social Peace Club over Brooks's shop, which I shall explain to you presently. It will be a very important and responsible post, so we shall want a really conscientious man and woman, and the wonderful thing is that just as we were thinking about it,

we had a man and woman sent to us in a way that we felt was really most wonderful and providential. We are going to call them steward and stewardess of the club, and their name is Mr. and Mrs. Blood. So who will second the motion that Mr. and Mrs. Blood be elected?"

It was seconded by Miss Agg, and carried as unanimously as everything else.

51

After this Mrs. Hope gave an address upon work among the poor, and all hearts were gladdened around her. And it mattered not which consideration floated uppermost in the minds of the ladies who went home from the vicarage tea party; it mattered not that this one thought of the duchess and that one of the bishop and a third one of the poor; some thought of the joyfulness of peace and some thought of the peacefulness of joy, and others of the great new epoch on the earth when all mankind should love mankind as well as Mrs. Hope loved her kitchen-maid. Some, also, tried to remember what they had learned from Mrs. Hope about the more abstruse technicalities of love, the proper duration of a truly friendly visit to a charwoman, the right topics to select when talking to a dustman's wife on terms of really Christian equality, and the way to find out which of the poor were living truly conscientious lives, and which were not. But all these divers meditations were illumined by an even higher cause of joyfulness, for the good are always happy, and each of the ladies felt herself fifty times as good and holy as any one she had ever heard of. So they all went home to radiate the joy that they had learned, Miss Trickey, and the chemist's daughter, Mrs. Heatherington-Smith, Miss Pinkley and the Misses Trotman, Brown's wife and Lady Budge, Miss Hornby, Mrs. Pewitt, and the rest. And if these were happy, what shall be said of Matt Blood and Eliza?

The joy and gratitude of Matt and Eliza were the first-fruits of the labour of love. It cost Mrs. Hope twenty shillings a week in wages and thirty pounds a year in rent, but Matt and Eliza were established over Brooks's shop as steward and stewardess of the Social Peace Club. They were the first steward and the first stewardess of the first Social Peace Club in all the world. So Mrs. Hope told them, and so Matt also told his own soul, for he had no sooner sent his notice to Underbell's and entered on his new duties than the enthusiasm of work came back to him like the years of his youth. His illness had only lasted forty-eight hours, and on the Wednesday he carted his furniture and possessions into the premises above Brooks's shop and the griefs and hardships and disappointments of a dozen years fell off his shoulders as he poured forth his plans and projects before the irresponsive Eliza. As for Eliza, she was happy in her own way. She was finding places in their little sitting-room above the club for all that had not been pawned or sold in the bad days, for the table and chairs and pots and pans, and the picture of Queen Victoria, and the photograph of Matt when he was the brilliant potman, and the stuffed fox, and the paper fans and the Chinese lantern and for all the new things which Mrs. Hope and Mrs. Trevanion had just given her in the bountifulness of their joy and love. She could not help saying that it all did seem odd and funny, and she pointed out to Matt that the children were so astonished they looked quite silly. They were dazed, like herself, by the comforts and beauties of the new home. All the top floor was given up to Matt and his family. They had a sitting-room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms, and all that their own possessions could not do to make the place pretty and comfortable had been done by the boundless kindness and generosity of Mrs. Hope. Eliza felt that her eyes would never get used to the sight of so many new belongings, and when she ceased thinking of

these she could reflect that behind them was a good and sure living, without rent, without fines, without anxiety. Hunger and sorrow were things of the past. Squalor and starvation were taken away. Social Peace was no vain dream in its bearing on the fortunes of Eliza.

Matt was glad enough to see the clean rooms. He was glad enough to see the full cupboard. He was glad enough to have the good income assured. But there were matters more important. This Social Peace was going to be a big thing. It was going to spread. Eliza talked of ending her days in these nice rooms, but she was as blind as a bat, for they were more likely to end their days in charge of some big Social Peace Club in London or Glasgow or Liverpool. Perhaps they would be earning several hundred pounds a year. Matt was going to make this job a success. He was going to stop drinking. He was going to work this club as he worked the Rising Sun, and if he did not smash the trade of every public house in Denbury in six months he would blow his brains out. He would pit his tea and coffee against their beer and gin, and throw his wits into the scale, and in less than you can wink your eye he would have the chaps trooping in, night after night, for talk and games and secret betting and to read the papers with the sporting news and settle about buying dogs. Matt saw it all. The thing could be done. As for Mrs. Hope, he had no fears about her. She was a lady, not like Miss Baker. She was very religious, he admitted; but that was how she raked in the money. Besides it was a good thing to be religious, Matt said.

And thus Matt talked, while Eliza cooked the most delicious cakes to be sold with the tea and coffee and lemonade at almost nominal prices to the men and women who might come into the club at night to talk on an equality with Miss Trickey and Lady Budge and Mrs. Pewitt, Miss Hornby, Miss Pinkley, and the rest. Several times a day

Mrs. Hope came tripping up the staircase to the top floor to have a talk with Matt about the work. She sat on the old sofa with the broken spring, petted the children, and smiled and chattered on in her inimitable style so that one might wonder what could possibly be the end of this ever growing intimacy. From this, indeed, should have been drawn some picture, some characteristic sketch, to be reproduced on the cover of each issue of the Social Peace Magazine. For here it was that the league took form and substance. Pretty, gentle, happy, Mrs. Hope would be shown in a pretty little costume of dark green, her shocked expression conspicuously absent, and the spirit of true lovingness dancing about her face like the bubbles on the surface of boiling water while she chattered and smiled and praised and patronised. Matt, with figure still youthful and not ungraceful, would appear beside her, standing with his hands on his hips and his legs apart, bending to listen, eager to get in his word. You would be left to guess which of the two was the more happy, and how many times the united happiness of both would have to be multiplied if it was to equal the sum of the happiness which they planned together to bestow upon their fellow creatures. For they settled it all between them. Street by street they went through the voter's list of Denbury. They decided into which houses which ladies should carry true friendship, and they classified the people of the place. On Matt's information they marked A against all who did not lead straight lives. B against those who betted on horses, C against those who used their children ill, D against the drunkards, F against the foul-mouthed, G against the godless, N against the nonconformists, T against the thriftless, U against the uncleanly, and W against those who beat their wives. So, to every erring mortal the loving ladies would know what help to bring, fluttering forth like ministering angels primed with facts

by Mrs. Hope, ever busy, ever happy, ever loving, and not even expecting to be addressed as "Ma'am" or "Miss." "It do seem odd," said Eliza when Mrs. Hope left the room.

And it seemed odd to Mrs. Hope too. It seemed quite odd that she had never thought of all this before. She had worked for many leagues and societies, but she had never thought of joining all forms of good work together in one league that should wipe the tears from all eyes and cure all the selfishness of the rich and all the vices of the poor by the simple plan of loving one another. The idea was tremendous, but she knew that the greatest ideas are always the simplest. To her it had been given. Yet she knew she must not claim the glory, for the glory was due to that Higher Power, which in this instance, and not for the first time, had scattered the proud and exalted the humble and meek. When Mrs. Hope remembered her own humility and meekness she quite understood why the great idea had been given to herself and not to the Duchess or Miss Baker; and she felt more truly happy than ever.

52

At this point it shall be stated plainly that Mrs. Hope was the abomination of desolation. She was much more frightful than Miss Baker. As a scarecrow is a counterfeit man set up to frighten birds, so she, in the torn trappings of sanctity, stood to frighten young and old from all the virtues among which she was stuck down. Whomsoever she set out to lead into goodness she pitched headlong into vice, were it only the vice of hypocrisy. The sight of her piety drove people away from churches; her disapproving glances would goad a youth into mischief; even a young girl's innocence perished when her basilisk eye was turned to inquire into it. And now she was going to make peace

between the classes. She was going to pry into every cottage with streams of blasphemous cant and strings of exasperating questions; she would have her nose in every scandal and her fingers on every speck of dust, pretending to love where she did not love, improving those who did not wish to be improved, and giving a bad name to every creature with a spark of spirit. She would give little badges to the goody-goody; she would drive the black sheep to the devil; the generality would hate her worse than ever they had hated Mr. Deane; and righteousness would be persecuted for her sake. The serious aspect of the matter was that she wormed herself into the confidence of Michael Jones, in whose charge were all the factory people, and she won an influence over him by her eagerness to help in his work. There was a fair prospect of Bobby's charity being administered in her pap-spoon and of Underbell's becoming a great experimental nursery for her system.

Mr. Deane had been the curse of Underbell's. Mrs. Hope seemed likely to succeed him. In Denbury, as in places more important, the curse of harsh employment bid fair to be followed by the curse of socialistic goody-goody. And the hope of Underbell's lay where the hope of England lies, did the poor but know it, did the rich but know it, in the possibilities that lurk where human character is still untainted by industrialism. The hope of Underbell's lay in the character of Bobby Wilton.

On the night of Thursday, the twenty-first of December, while Mrs. Hope was at tea with the Bloods in the club, to show how much she loved the poor, Bobby was at dinner with the party who had come to Orchard Wilton for the season of Christmas. His wife, his mother, and his aunt, were there as usual. The others were guests. There were Jock and Wilfred Rannard, brothers of Marian Wilton's first husband, and Ethel Rannard who was Jock's bride. These, with cousin Mary Wilton and Kate Deane, a sister

of Marian's, were of the family. From outside the family came Curly Edwards, an old friend of Bobby's, and his wife, Mr. Carpenter, a clergyman, and Malcolm Forth who was called Keddy, whose friendship with Bobby had begun at Oxford. He was now a schoolmaster, though, as Bobby said, you 'd never know it. And every one of these was here because their company gave pleasure to Bobby; of those who sat at meat with him there was not one invited from a sense of duty, not one whose absence he would not have regretted. And among them he enjoyed himself, for, with the obvious exceptions they were young and pleasant and cheerful. Since he was going to a boxing class after dinner he wore white flannel trousers and the blue jacket of the Coulscombe cricket club, a costume that had a good effect upon his spirits. Mrs. Edwards was on his right, and her talk had the sort of humour that kept him in delight. On his left was Ethel Rannard, a girl of extreme charm and beauty at this time hardly twenty years old. Each of these knew more of the world than Bobby, but conversation was assured, for his blunt and eager questions showed a kind of genius on these occasions, while his comments had a point of view.

Meanwhile, in a room upstairs, in a bedroom where the oak of the panels and the wardrobes and bedsteads had the memories of three hundred years, while the linen was sweet with the lavender of yesterday, Eddie Durwold in the light of candles was dressing himself after a late arrival from Newton Royal Station. He had gone back to school from Denbury on Sunday. On Monday, when the school broke up for the Christmas holidays, he was detained that his conduct might be investigated. He was then as awkwardly placed as he had ever in his life been before. But he had some resources. The world is so human that a bad boy who has behaved nicely at his tutor's tea-table may, at a crisis, fare better than another.

Influence of such a kind was employed on Eddie's behalf. Sentence of expulsion was commuted to an adequate flogging. After this he retired to the house of his cousin Yardale, in the country, where he carried on negotiations with his mother and with Bobby in the time that he could spare from shooting Yardale's pheasants. He was successful. Forgiveness flowed towards him, penitent as he declared himself to be, and Yardale gave him a five-pound note for Christmas and another for his adventures.

He studied himself in the mirror. Bobby would have told him to wear things for boxing, little as he knew about that art, but Bobby had not seen him. So he was spick and span in evening dress. Satisfied with his appearance, he came down to the dining-room with the shyness natural in any one arriving so late.

53

In the dining-room the first face he recognised was that of Robin Dennet, for the boys from the stables helped the parlour-maids when the party at dinner was large. Robin whispered in Bobby's ear, and Bobby jumped up and began without delay to say what he thought about the inconvenience of the hours of the trains. At the same time he put an arm round Eddie's neck and led him towards Marian, who rose and said coolly such things as a kind woman must say on such occasions. There was a disturbance because it appeared that no place at the table had been laid for him. Bobby was distressed by this. He dragged a chair from the wall and set it at the end of the table, next to his own, while Dennet with terrified rapidity brought knives and forks and glasses. "This is the fellow," said Bobby to Ethel Rannard, by way of introduction "who walked all the way from Newton Royal in the middle of the night to bring me a piece of news."

"I saw your photograph in the *Illustrated Voice* on Tuesday," said she.

"All Bobby's friends get posts given them," said Keddy on her other side. "This fellow is the chief of the secret police. We shall get the truth about Denbury at last."

"Yes, he 's my Baker-hound," said Bobby, rather grimly. "But you won't get the truth yet because he 's going to have his dinner."

Eddie was inclined to blush at his celebrity among strangers. But he quickly decided that Ethel Rannard was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. So he plunged into confidence and told her what a fool the *Illustrated Voice* had made him feel. He was opening a delightful flirtation, and doing it quite prettily, but they interrupted him.

"The great thing to know," said Wilfred Rannard, "is which of Bobby's scandals Miss Baker is going to publish."

Eddie did not know, and some one observed that it is dangerous to start denying accusations until you know which one you have to meet.

"And is he still to be lynched?" Wilfred asked, "or does the scandal do instead?"

"Now they are going to make Bobby angry," said Marian to Mr. Carpenter at the other end of the table.

"Angry?"

"Yes. They are going to tease him about Denbury."

"That will be dreadful," said the clergyman with a laugh.

"No it won't, but it will be very unkind," she said. "It is too bad of Keddy and Wilfred."

For a time the conversation took a safer turn when they started to question Eddie upon the origin of his acquaintance with Miss Baker. Bobby advised him not to answer a word, but his blushes roused a teasing spirit in Keddy and parts of the story of the Maryhill churchyard were

extracted from him. It aroused a good deal of surprise. Unfortunately the name of Mrs. Hope was mentioned, leading back to a topic which Bobby could not endure with any show of patience.

"Mrs. Hope is the woman who has started the Social Peace League at Denbury," said Keddy, "and to-day, my dear Bobby, I see she has elected you president of it."

Here Aunt Elizabeth took up the subject. She was sitting next to Keddy with her knitting hanging from her neck by a piece of ribbon. "I think it was very impertinent of them to elect Bobby without asking leave," she said. "Only this afternoon in Coulscombe I met Mrs. Tracey and she said I didn't know your nephew was taking up social work. And I said Really. And she said Yes, and I said Why? and she said He is president of the Social Peace League, do you think he would join our Christian Social Union in the county, and Lady Elphley called and said the same, your nephew becoming quite famous, I said Why, she said He is president of the Social Peace League, I said he is nothing of the sort, you are making a mistake, and she said well in Newton every one is saying it, I said, very possibly, he is certainly acting in a very handsome manner towards those poor people at Denbury but he is president of nothing yet, he is acting in a very handsome manner towards Denbury, but he feels he has a duty to Denbury on account of his becoming as it were the principal person in that place——"

The placid narrative might have lasted much longer, for when Aunt Elizabeth talked at all she talked at length, with her eyes half closed, till the objects round her seemed to dance up and down and rock and reel and grow unreal in contrast with her enduring tranquillity. But on this occasion Bobby interrupted her. He pushed back his chair and jumped up. "I 'm due at my boxing in the village," he said, not very pleasantly.

Marian left her place and came round to him. "But you

were going to take Mr. Durwold," she said, in a manner that carried an appeal and a slight reproach. She wished him to do or say something amiable before he left his guests in this fashion.

"He hasn't had his dinner," said Bobby.

"But he would enjoy it."

"He can enjoy something else."

"Bobby!" she said, appealingly.

"Well, make him hurry up, and I 'll wait for him in the trap," he answered.

"The boxing will pacify him," Marian said to Mr. Carpenter, when he had left the room. "Keddy is so unkind and Aunt Elizabeth is so stupid."

"What does he really intend to do about Denbury?" the clergyman asked.

"If you want the truth," said she, "he is perfectly sick of the whole subject."

54

Eddie was not sure that to stay and say amusing things to Ethel Rannard would not please him more than the boxing class, but he could see that Marian desired him to go with Bobby, and to go as soon as possible. Robin Dennet, in fact, stood behind his chair and gave him his food as fast as he could eat it. In a few minutes he was ready to go. He managed his exit with perfect self-possession.

He found Bobby lying at full length on the rug in front of the fire in the hall, his face buried in the neck of Rebel, the deer-hound. Evidently he was pouring out his sorrows to this not very sympathetic comforter. He got up.

"Pity you 're not more sensibly dressed, Eddie," he said. "Have you got a thick coat?"

"Anything will do," the boy answered.

"Oh, you 'll catch cold," said Bobby. "Come over here."

A table near the hall door was piled with coats and rugs, from which Bobby chose a great sheep-skin motor coat of Jock Rannard's and he made the boy wear it, becoming, as his habit was, eager and imperious on the point. He had evidently forgotten his annoyance. He took a light overcoat for himself and they went out into the open air which he sniffed appreciatively. A groom was waiting with a pony and trap. Over the business of getting Eddie safely and comfortably settled in his seat Bobby fussed in a manner bordering on absurdity.

"Well, I 'm glad to get away from that damn foolish talk," he said, as they drove along, "and I call it very jolly of you to come out like this, 'pon my word, I do. But you 'll enjoy it, Eddie. You 'll meet some of the best fellows there are. My boxing boys are simply angels. If you 'd seen them when I had my elections they 'd simply have made you cry."

"Did you take them down into Cornwall, then?" asked Eddie.

"I took pretty nearly the whole village," he answered. "The fact was, they took themselves. I suppose it was very eccentric. I say, Eddie, you liked Ethel Rannard, didn't you?"

"She 's simply charming," said the boy.

"I thought you liked her. But what you ought to do is to fall in love with Mary."

"Who is she?"

"My cousin; the dark girl in blue. You 'll notice her to-morrow. I 'd like you to marry her, only you 're too young. By the way, I never asked you, you *are* a bit of a bruiser, aren't you?"

"I have never bruised a fly," said Eddie.

"What a pity!" said Bobby.

Eddie said that Bobby would have to forgive him. They were at the park gate, and Bobby whistled for some one from the lodge to come and open it. No one came, so Eddie jumped out and pushed the heavy iron gates sufficiently wide apart. He waited, but the trap did not move. He called out, and Bobby said, "Hullo, I was asleep."

"I 'm sorry you 're not a bruiser, Eddie," he said, as they drove on. "But never mind. Wait till Saturday, and I 'll give you a day's hunting. I expect that 'll be more in your line, and to tell you the truth, when I was your age it was more in my line too. Oh, if I 'd had some hammering from Tom Trevor when I was your age I 'd have been saved a lot of bother. Well, the next thing would be for me to begin to teach you in the gallery before breakfast every morning while you 're here. I think that would be a very good thing indeed. You sit still to-night and watch Tom Trevor for all you are worth. I tell you it 's a most extraordinary thing how all these things depend on science. Sometimes I think it 's positively beastly. Pluck ought to count for more than science, and that 's what I thought when I was your age, but the devil is that it doesn't. Some fellow ought to write a book about it and teach all the plucky boys no end of a lot they ought to know. Now in boxing it' s not a year since I could lick Tom Trevor three times out of four though he' s twice my weight and six times my muscle. That was just because I put my mind into the science of it. And then he took to science too, and it has been the very devil ever since. I think I 'm more proud of Tom than of anything I ever had. I 'm going to see him through to some sort of championship. Eddie, mind you 're nice to Tom. Don't be shy with him. You know you ought really to have taken him with you when you went out that night at Denbury. He 'd have died sooner than let any one touch you, so if they had found you he 'd have been useful."

They came to a halt, in the middle of the village street, with the Wilton Arms on their right and the Parish Room on their left. They turned into the yard of the inn, where Mr. Kinglove made them welcome. He took charge of the pony and trap, and Bobby and Eddie walked across to the Room.

55

The Room was about thirty yards long by fifteen yards wide. Its floor was of planks, its ceiling was whitewashed, and its walls were lined with matchboard. There was a good fireplace at one end, and another half-way down the side opposite the door. The other end was blocked with chairs and forms and tables piled high towards the ceiling. A dozen oil lamps fixed to the walls gave the place, with the bright blaze of the fires, a cheerful air. The walls were adorned with large photographs framed in gilded wood, photographs of the last three English Sovereigns, of Bobby's grandfather, of some village groups, of Lord Roberts, the late Lord Salisbury, and Archbishop Benson. On a table in one corner were plates of buns, glasses, and several great jugs full of lemonade. The place was somewhat overheated.

Of those present about twenty were young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, who were destined, evidently, to take part in the boxing. All of these wore rubber shoes, grey flannel trousers, and white sweaters. On the latter, over the region of the heart, were embroidered three letters in red silk, C. B. C., the meaning of which was fairly plain since Coulscombe begins with a C.

A proportion of these boys and men were from Bobby's stables and kennels and gardens, but many were in other employment in the village and on the farms. What was remarkable was that among them were several of the sons of farmers, for whom it must have been far more difficult to suspend their class superiority than it was for Bobby.

There was a system of rotation, so that all of the boxing class did not box on the same evening. A dozen or more, in their ordinary clothes, were present as spectators. There were older men present too, smoking and talking and sitting all over the place. In all, some forty men were present.

It is worth noting, if there is any interest in these *minutiæ*, that whereas the democratic Mrs. Hope would have proceeded at once to the end of the room to bid the whole party heartily welcome from an insecure perch on the seat of a chair, the aristocratic Bobby was at once involved in conversation with the first whom he met as he entered the Room. He was very anxious that they should understand that Eddie was not going to box, but wanted to look on. Then the proceedings were held up for some moments while he fumbled about with the arm of a boy who was supposed to have strained his elbow. There was also a boy who had missed the last three classes, and Bobby wanted to know what he meant by it. There were family reasons, it appeared, and he was curious to know what they were. Then he had a word to say to old Dennet about the carting of some trees. In other parts of the room his arrival did not seem to have caused the least disturbance, for the talk went on as before. Dick Yeo, who was near the door, had a matter to relate about the new bridge over the Went. This raised some claim on Bobby's gratitude, which he expressed bluntly and emphatically. Then the boxing instructor from Newton Royal came towards him, and he said they must get to work. If Bobby showed a trace of artificial kindness to any one it was to Durwold, lest he should not feel himself at home.

"Where is Tom?" he asked. Tom had a sort of unofficial precedence among the boxing class, on account of his proficiency. It was like the precedence of Miss Agg among the ladies of Maryhill on account of the exceptional splendour of her morals. But Tom was not to be seen at this moment.

"Take Mr. Durwold's coat and hang it up somewhere, will you," Bobby said to one of the boys. "Where has Tom got to?"

He proceeded towards the fireplace, pulling off his flannel jacket and looking about for Tom Trevor. A little knot of young men followed him, whispering together with some degree of agitation. One of them, who was employed at the forge where Tom worked, was pushed forward by the others. He had a heavy inexpressive face, very suitable in a bearer of bad news.

"Sir Robert!" he began.

Bobby turned round, and answered, "Yes?"

"Tom 'll not come to-night."

"Why not?"

The youth looked about to make sure that no one was quite near enough to overhear him. "He 's drinking," he said.

"But he ought not to be drinking to-night," said Bobby, as if that expression of opinion would alter the facts of the case. "He ought not to drink at all," he added. "Do you mean he 's drunk?"

"Yes, Sir Robert."

"Where is he?"

"The Arms."

"What the devil does Kinglove mean by allowing—" Bobby began. He checked himself. "I 'll go across and see him," he said. "Where 's Mr. Durwold? Eddie, you 'd better come along with me."

56

Between the door of the Room and the door of the Wilton Arms a painful incident befell them, painful for Bobby for ordinary reasons and painful for Eddie because it unpleasantly recalled one of the small follies of his past. A sturdy

middle-aged man with a grizzled beard ran up to them, and seized one of Bobby's arms with both his hands.

"Hullo!" cried Bobby in surprise. "Hullo, it 's Wake? What 's the matter?"

"I knew where I 'd find you, Mr. Bobby," said the farmer, who was much excited and distressed. "Bessie has run away."

"Bless my soul!" said Bobby. "What has she done that for?"

"Nobody knows. It was only yesterday she come back from the Marquis of Clon Taff, and now she is gone. All morning, she sits at home, and after dinner she goes out to Went Wood, and now she is gone and left a letter to say we shall never see her again." He added, turning to Bobby's companion, "it 's my daughter, sir."

Eddie felt uncomfortable, wondering what Mr. Wake would say if he knew to whom it was those words were addressed. Though he had not a keen conscience, nor a heavy crime upon it, he did not like meeting Bessie's father under these circumstances.

"Have you any idea where she has gone?" Bobby asked.

"I have not," said the farmer, "but I know what I fear, for she was terrible wild, surely, to go like that. Not a stick of clothing did she take but what she wore. I reckon she 'll drown herself."

Eddie began to be horribly frightened, and had to remind himself that things which are impossible do not happen, so that there was a limit to that for which he could be answerable. They stood in the middle of the deserted street, with the lights of the Room behind them and the lights of the inn in front of them. Bobby began to make his usual gesture of perplexity, cutting at his leg with an imaginary whip.

"If we raise the village she will never hear the last of it," he observed, and he asked if it were not probable that she

had gone to some friends. If she had money she might mean to walk to Newton Royal and stay there. It was more likely, however, that she was with friends. He pressed Mr. Wake to think with what friends she might choose to take refuge. The farmer could not guess. So Bobby told him with good-natured emphasis that the idea of her drowning herself was simply ridiculous.

His instincts would have led him to call out the whole village and start such a hue and cry as would have been remembered for a generation. But he was sure this course would not be approved by Marian, and with Marian he decided to consult. A private telephone connected Orchard Wilton with the Coulscombe post-office. He asked the farmer to come with him to the post-office, which was three minutes' walk along the street, and he begged Eddie in the meantime to go, like a good fellow, and get Tom Trevor out of the public house and bring him also to wait outside the post-office door.

By the aid of the telephone the mystery regarding Bessie, though not explained, was cleared of its alarming character. Marian reported that the girl was at Orchard Wilton, where she would spend the night. She had behaved very foolishly, said Marian, in a matter which could be explained later, but there was nothing that need cause the Wakes the least alarm. So Bobby was able to give the farmer substantial consolation, sending him home at once to allay the fears of his wife. In the street, as they left the post-office, he looked about for Tom and Eddie. They were not to be seen. He started to walk in the direction of the Wilton Arms.

Meanwhile the Wilton Arms had been the scene of a catastrophe. Eddie, though glad to be relieved of the presence of Mr. Wake, was very unhappy nevertheless. He dug his hands in the pockets of Jock's big coat and walked slowly towards the inn while he reflected that if

Bessie had drowned herself it would surely be thought due to tribulations with which he was connected. Such is the malice of a wicked world. He cursed himself thoroughly for the folly of his flirtation with her. Such things appeared particularly idiotic in comparison with the charm of sitting beside Ethel Rannard at dinner. He was afraid he would get into the most dreadful trouble now.

A moment later he entered the inn and paused in the passage, hearing what he would have described as a sound of revelry if he had not perceived, in the declamatory noise that reached him, a tragic note. It came through a door on his right. Almost at once this door opened and a man of the labouring class came out, letting the door bang behind him.

"Is Tom Trevor in there?" Eddie asked.

"Ess, mister," said the man heavily. "He 'll be no better till he 's been worse."

"What is the matter with him?"

"You could say spirits and you could say he 's crazed mad with this about Mr. Wake's daughter, and you 'd be right both ways. You 'll excuse me, mister, you come about the boxing?"

"Yes," said the boy, with a fresh access of anxiety. "What is it that has happened about Bessie Wake?"

"You 'll excuse me striking a match, mister?" the man remarked, and he applied the flame to the black ashes in the bowl of his pipe, which glowed red immediately. "Tom 'll do no boxing to-night, mister."

"What has happened about Bessie?"

"I reckon," said the man, "there was always more in her goings on than what the folks would speak of. And Tom, I reckon he knows it now. You going back across to the boxing, mister?"

"Presently," said the boy, who despaired of extracting more news. "I must see Tom first. Is this the door?"

"Ess, mister. In there he is."

Eddie was now even more uncomfortable than he had been in the presence of Mr. Wake. Expecting some peril to his person, if Tom should be drunk and should have heard of his dealings with Bessie, he was unable to go gaily to the encounter yet ashamed to take the prudent course of waiting for Bobby's protection. He pushed the door open with his shoulder, and entered the bar with gloomy apprehensions. Within, he saw Tom, looking very wild, leaning his right elbow on the bar by which he stood, and gesticulating with his left hand. He was talking, as Eddie supposed from the words he heard, not about Bessie but about politics. His gipsy appearance was conspicuous to-night. Eddie had forgotten what a ferocious looking fellow he was. Behind the counter Mr. Kinglove was sitting on a stool, plainly despising Tom. Two labourers sat on a bench, holding mugs of beer, and serving as Tom's audience.

"Hullo, Tom, good-evening," Eddie began. "We 've met before, haven't we?"

"Mis' Durwold," Tom observed, making no movement but to roll his eyes in Eddie's direction.

"Sir Robert told me to ask you to come and meet him outside the post-office," said the boy.

There was no reply.

"It 's about the boxing. Will you come along?"

"I 'll *come along*," said Tom, borrowing the words, and pushing himself off from the bar as he approached Eddie, "I 'll *come along* as far as tell you, Mis' Durwold, that you are a —— cad. And that 's from some one you know of. D 'you hear?"

"I think you 're drunk," the boy answered. He was pretty sure that there was trouble coming now, but, like a deer before a serpent, he could neither fight nor fly. True to his type, however, he stood still while Tom struck him

heavily between the eyes and he fell to the ground, unconscious, not uttering a sound.

By the time when Bobby reached the Wilton Arms, looking for Tom and Eddie, Mr. and Mrs. Kinglove had made a little sick-room of the inn parlour. Tom having departed immediately after his outburst, Kinglove carried Eddie to the parlour, and laid him on the sofa, shouting for Mrs. Kinglove all the while. She came, and ran back hastily for a basin of cold water. With this she splashed his face, while Kinglove, with faith in sterner remedies, forced a quantity of brandy between his teeth. So they brought him back to consciousness, and he began to explain that he felt perfectly well. His nose, however, was bleeding profusely.

Considering the theories upon which Bobby based his life he could hardly have received news more distressing than Kinglove's account of this affair. It was bad enough that a friend of his own from under his own roof should be assaulted in his own village. But that the aggressor should be Tom, the darling of his heart, his pet pugilist and ruffian, was a calamity that struck him mute. The orthodox conception of Tom's blows was that they were delivered as and where Bobby required them, with precision, like the charges of shot from his gun. The present situation, therefore, seemed almost parricidal. He was shocked in the same way as Mrs. Hope when she found her secretary making friends with the Maryhill schoolboys.

When he had sent the Kingloves out of the room he sat down on the sofa, by Eddie's legs, and began to find his tongue.

"Eddie, my goodness, what in God's earth made him do it?"

"Righteous indignation," said the boy, mopping his nose; "an aggravated attack of it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean about me and Bessie Wake. That 's what I think it was."

"But that 's all forgotten."

"It must have returned to his memory," said Eddie. "Or more likely he has only just heard that I was the fellow."

"Oh, what a miserable blasted pity!" cried Bobby. "I shall have to make Tom suffer for it. And you, Eddie, I 'm so ashamed of such a thing happening to you."

"What have you done about Bessie?" Eddie asked.

"Nothing. She 's up at home, and Marian says it is nothing a bit serious.

"Hurray!" said the boy.

"You simply live in the wars," said Bobby. "And I 've not been able to keep you safe even down here. 'Pon my word I shall never forgive myself. And what am I to do about Tom? Oh, Hell!"

He rose and walked up and down for some moments, acutely distressed. Then the thought of the boxing occurred to him, as a duty in the midst of woe, and he asked if Eddie would mind his going across to the Room for a quarter of an hour to see how things were going. "I 'll send a boy to look after you till I come back," he said. "I 'll not let you be alone again. No! Not for worlds!"

57

"Oh, I shall have to tackle him," Jock Rannard grumbled. "Bless me, how a fellow does get cursed when all his closest friends get together without him!"

"I know," observed Wilfred. "We curse him, but we should all be too polite to curse his port."

"Well, I shall have to tackle him."

"Tackle Marian first."

"That 's no use at all. She only talks sarcasms about

him and admires him all the more. Thank goodness I 'm a shopkeeper. There 's need of one in this family."

Jock was a little unjust to himself. He was not really a shopkeeper, but, by inheritance, a merchant in a particularly large way of business. Nor did he look like a shopkeeper, but like a man who has hardly ever met a shopkeeper, even to ask him for a vote. Unfortunately for himself he was not only wealthy but so transparently honest and cautious and thorough that now, at the age of twenty-eight, he was trustee under everybody's settlements and burdened with a load of other people's affairs.

Bobby having gone to his boxing class, and the ladies having left the dining-room, Jock was left at the table with Mr. Carpenter, Edwards, Wilfred, and Keddy, oppressively regarded by the eyes of Bobby's forebears in their frames on the walls, men and women who had despised trade and traders in the way that we all used to think so shocking. Jock did not care twopence for the opinions of the dead, but was troubled by the opinions of Bobby.

"I 've had enquiries made absolutely independently," he said, chewing the end of his cigar and speaking in the grumbling manner of an old man whose advice is rejected, "and it 's true enough, this pot and pan business is broke, broke beyond hope, and the Germans have got all the business. Bobby's left Michael Jones to pay all those fellows regular wages just as if the factory was working. It can't be less than three hundred pounds a week, and he can't afford it, he can't afford a quarter of it. Well, who 's going to stop it? They 're all crazy, quite crazy, Marian as crazy as all the rest. I 'm trustee in both her marriage settlements, and trustee in the Orchard Wilton settlement as well. Bobby has no more idea than his own baby what to do about it. He won't even talk about it. His head 's full of notions about doing the handsome thing. I *must* tackle him. I don't want to, but I *must* tackle him."

There was not a dissenting voice, nor yet a practical suggestion. Jock gazed into his finger-bowl, and appeared to see worse and worse aspects of the matter.

"Here we 're drinking his port," he said, "and goodness knows how long he 'll have any left. There isn't much difference between Bobby's goings-on and literal Christianity. He certainly doesn't take any thought for the morrow and he gives his goods to the poor——"

"And turns his cheek to the boxing class," suggested Keddy.

"——which would be well enough, of course, if he meant it that way," Jock went on, thinking that he might have hurt Mr. Carpenter's feelings. "But you can't call Bobby that sort of man, hunting four days a week, and so on. You can't live the life he lives and be a primitive Christian too. Besides, he doesn't want to. It 's just his pride and his notions about aristocracy. And bless my soul he could do so much more if he went about it sensibly. If he 'd only make money instead of chucking it away he might—by Jove, that sort of argument might really have some effect on him. I think that 's what I 'll tell him."

Jock said no more on the subject, but felt that he had won half his battle. Some arguments appear to be so forcible that it remains only to choose the right time to press them and they are bound to be accepted. If Bobby's conceptions of honour required him to act like a public department towards his poor neighbours, Jock argued, it was obvious he would be more effective if he moderated his transports with a few of the accepted rules of business. As one might say to a Christian, you cannot give to the poor if you have nothing left to give. Or, to an aristocrat, you cannot be a shining and a burning light if you are a bankrupt. But, judiciously controlled, the noble heart of a tolerably rich young gentleman may do a great deal of

good and be a very fine affair. Jock decided to ask Bobby to be sensible to-day that he might the better be romantic to-morrow. But this was not all. He meant to throw enthusiasm into the idea of that great to-morrow, when, prudently applied, the methods of Bobby might embarrass the Liberals through three or four constituencies and give the name of country gentleman a fillip of much local importance. There was, so to speak, money in the notion. Jock certainly did not mean to make use of any such vulgar phrase, but he was prepared to offer Bobby most hearty encouragement in return for a promise of sane behaviour as regarded the present affairs of Denbury.

58

Jock's plan failed; once because Bobby was too miserable to be talked to, and again because he was too happy.

The misery was due to Tom Trevor's attack on Durwold. They were in the billiard room, some playing bridge and others playing billiards, when Bobby returned from his boxing class. With no attempt to hide his depression he walked up to the bridge table where Marian sat, and watched the game, till the end of a hand.

"Marian," he said then, very gloomily, "I want you to go, sometime or other, if you don't mind, and have a look at Eddie Durwold and see if you think he 's all right."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I 've sent him to bed."

"But what has happened?"

"Tom is drunk," he replied, "and he has knocked Eddie down in the bar of the Wilton Arms. That 's all, and for one evening I think it 's about enough."

Then it seemed to occur to him that his manners might be better, so he went and talked to Mr. Carpenter who was enthusiastically looking on at the game of billiards. But

neither then, nor later when they sat in the smoking room, was he anything but gloomy. At breakfast the next morning he was the same. His unapproachable mood was the more exasperating to Jock because, as it happened, the day's programme was going to throw him and Bobby together. The ladies of the party, all but Marian, who was busy, were driving somewhere for a luncheon picnic. Bobby was to ride, with any one who cared to accompany him. Nobody did, except Jock, so the chances of a serious talk between them were as good as could be wished.

With characteristic caution and thoroughness Jock had been sitting in his dressing room till one o'clock the previous night making notes of what he proposed to say to Bobby. It was an admirable habit in one who wrote more coherently than he talked. Though the notes would never be seen by any eyes but his, they would clear his mind and enable him to express himself with greater precision and force. So it was all written down, the best wisdom of a cool head and a generous heart in whose affections Bobby had had a place since he was an inky schoolboy of thirteen. Noble instincts require a bridle—that is what Jock's opinions came to. If Bobby should follow the course now taken in Denbury, it would lead him to financial embarrassment. Alternatively, on the other hand, in the other event—(all these expressions came to Jock's assistance at one point or another)—if Bobby would cut his nobility, or his coat, to suit his purse or cloth, he, having an expectation of half a century of life, might do incalculable good and win a name to add lustre to the family whose virtues covered the walls of Coulscombe church, but whose motto, *Territus Terreo*, could no more be taken literally than could the motto of any one else. You cannot, Jock wrote, terrify a bank balance. But if you show some sense of business you can ultimately terrify the Liberals and do no end of the very finest sort of good.

All this unanswerable counsel was ready in his head when he went upstairs to dress himself for riding, but he feared Bobby was too melancholy to give it much attention. However, when the time came, the difficulty was precisely opposite. Bobby was too exuberantly happy.

Tom Trevor was again the cause and Jock was a witness of the transformation. Descending the steps from the hall door he saw Dennet holding the horse he was to ride. Bobby, already mounted, was fumbling with his reins and evidently pretending not to see Tom as he walked up to him. "Now for a feudal survival!" thought Jock.

Upon the whole the powerful young man behaved better than his lord. About Bobby's severity there was something artificial, but not about Tom's penitence. He did not look in the least criminal or hang-dog, but the trouble in his very expressive eyes was enough to have softened even the virtues of Miss Agg.

"Mr. Bobby!" he said.

Bobby would not look at him. He was in dire disgrace.

"Mr. Bobby, I don't know what I can say to you."

"It 's not *me*," Bobby answered coldly. "What you had better do is to apologise to Mr. Durwold."

"Sir, where is he?" Tom asked.

"You had better find out," said Bobby.

He told Jock to mount, and rode slowly towards the drive. But he had not gone twenty yards before he drew rein and called Tom to his side.

"When you have apologised to Mr. Durwold," he said, in an unrelenting voice, "you are to ask Bessie Wake to marry you. You are to ask her again. Do you see?"

Tom had no words; he could hardly believe what he heard.

"Don't you make any mistake," said Bobby. "You are to do that because I say so."

Thus ended the period of gloom. Complete satisfaction

come back to Bobby's face from the moment when he turned his back on Tom, and, as they rode along, the product of his good temper was bestowed on Jock in three characteristic outbursts. The first was an inordinate solicitude for Jock's comfort on his horse, to which was joined a history of the horse, his virtues, vices, achievements, parentage, and subtlest psychological peculiarities. The second was a complete account of an offer of marriage made by Tom to Bessie Wake, her refusal on the grounds of unworthiness, her confession of the affair with Durwold, her flight from a home that she imagined herself to have disgraced, and Marian's incomparable skill last night in scolding her into a more sensible frame of mind. The third outburst was little less than a rhapsody.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight," Bobby counted. "Yes, they ought to have eight boys and girls, at least. You 've not seen Bessie, but you 've seen Tom and she 's as fine as he is. 'Pon my soul and honour how those fellows can waste their lives with politics is more than I shall ever understand. Lloyd George is patching up consumptives while I will breed boys from Tom and Bessie who will ride and shoot and tell the truth. If Lloyd George knew the sort of lads I 'll breed here he 'd pass an act to stop me."

"I hope you 'll make all this quite clear to Tom and Bessie," Jock observed.

Bobby began to laugh.

"Look here," said Jock, "I agree with you altogether, really, but I do want to talk to you about one thing you won't like half as much."

"Go ahead," said Bobby.

"It 's about Denbury."

"Denbury?"

"Yes. Now, look here, Bobby——"

"I say! You 're not going to rag me like Keddy, are you?"

"Certainly not, I 'm going to be very serious."

"Well, I 'll be serious too."

"Look here," said Jock, remembering his notes, "God knows I understand your feelings about doing the decent thing, but I do want to say——"

Unluckily, at this moment, he was interrupted by the behaviour of Bobby's horse, a young grey, with an Arab appearance about his neck and jaw. He shied, as it seemed, at something. He reared, and began to back and curvet so that Jock was forced to wait till he was quieted.

"My dear Talgai," Bobby remarked, "what on earth is the matter? What an extraordinary way to behave? I can't imagine what on earth makes you make such an ass of yourself! For goodness' sake be more sensible."

"Now I 'll tell you all about Talgai and what makes him behave like that," he said to Jock, when peace was restored. Then followed a story in which there was obviously not a word of truth. When it was over Jock began again about Denbury. But he had not said six words before Talgai misbehaved once more. This time it was evident that Bobby had given him some provocation, Jock could not tell what, but it was enough to make him plunge about and bring conversation to an end.

"'Pon my word, Talgai, you are disgraceful," Bobby said, in grieved and shocked reproof.

Some one's temper was bound to go if this continued, and it was Jock's that went first.

"Are you going to do that every time I try to talk about Denbury?" he asked.

"Every time except one," said Bobby.

"What do you mean?"

"Every time except the time you start off by telling me you 've thought out a way of getting the Denbury lads a living."

"Well, that 's an elaborate way of letting me know it."

"I would have put it much more plainly," Bobby answered, "if I wasn't in such a good temper about Tom, who is worth forty-four thousand times as much as the whole of Denbury rolled into one. But Denbury exists, Jock, bad luck to it!"

59

Eddie Durwold was sacrificed to Aunt Elizabeth's conviction, which had the proportions of a landslide in her nature, that he ought not to go for a picnic the day after being stunned by Tom Trevor. He was left behind. He was walking through the hall, to get into the open air, when he came upon Marian.

"Come and help me, Mr. Durwold," she said.

"What am I to do?" he asked, drawing near to the table at which she sat. The table held so many things that he was puzzled.

"Help me to put these sweets into these muslin bags. There are four boxes of sweets. Put some from each box into each bag and then give them to me to tie up with ribbon. Will you do that?"

"I should love to," said he.

"They are for the children's tea party on Christmas day," she told him.

"I say! What lucky children!" he said, starting on the work.

"Are you sure you have no headache, Mr. Durwold?"

"Quite certain."

"Has Tom apologised?"

"He found me on the terrace," Eddie answered. "It was a terrifying apology."

Marian said that she was glad to hear it. "You are putting too many sweets in," she added. "You will make the children ill."

"I 'll start again."

"Much less in each bag."

"Like that?"

"Yes, that 's perfect."

"What else happens on Christmas day, besides the children?" he asked.

"A dance in this hall," she told him. "The day ends frantically, but it begins religiously. That reminds me, you will want to go to mass."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does. You will have to go to Newton. You shall have your choice between riding in and driving in a trap with yourself for coachman."

"I shall choose the trap. You and Bobby will spoil all my morals by being so good to me," he said. "I say, Lady Wilton, what made Bessie run away from home?"

"An offer of marriage from Tom," said Marian, "which she refused during temporary insanity. That 's all."

"And then she ran away?"

"Yes, to ask if I 'd send her to New Zealand."

"And you?"

"I gave her some good advice. The next time Tom proposes she will accept him."

"How romantic! That accounts for my distressing incident with Tom. Do you know, something awful is going to happen?"

"What is it?" she asked.

"I am going to run out of brandy balls," he announced.

"You must have miscalculated."

"I have, and if we were really honest we should have to go back and open all the bags you have done up and take some brandy balls out of each to make them go round."

"We will perpetrate a fraud on the remaining children," said Marian. "Instead of brandy balls we will give them chocolate creams."

"What! And say nothing about it?"

"Not a syllable."

"How awful!" he whispered.

"Infirm of purpose," she replied. "Give *me* the chocolate creams."

60

"Oh, Constance, you are not doing the banner *quite* right," said Mrs. Hope, for at Denbury too there were preparations for Christmas. Mrs. Trevanion was stitching the words "Peace and Love" in slabs of white cotton wadding upon a banner of turkey red evidently designed for use in a procession.

"But isn't this how you meant it to be?" she asked.

"No dear," said Mrs. Hope brightly, "the letters should come nearer together, and they should begin nearer the top, and I thought I told you that the letters S. P. L. should come above 'Christmas Union,' because I think we ought to make every one understand that the Christmas Union is really a branch of the S. P. L., a reward we are giving to those who have done most for social peace in the last few days, and I am afraid we must really and truly start again, because it is so important to have it quite right; the cotton wool should be stitched in wider lines, too, so as to make it glisten more when we put the frost on, and when you remember the object I know you won't mind the little extra trouble, dear. The idea of social peace has made Christmas so important, you see. There, the letters ought to be as wide as that, quite, and then they will be clearly seen by every one when we carry the banner round, and I thought, afterwards, we might give the banner to the club to hang up in the room, so that they would always have the words Peace and Love before them, to remind them, wouldn't they, and they will hope that next Christmas they may deserve to belong to the Christmas Union too.

We can't tell how often they may be helped by that thought if it is up on the wall. There, I think that is the proper distance between the letters. I know you won't mind doing it over again; sacred work ought to be done so carefully and reverently, of course. And the experience will help you when you begin working on the Easter Expectation League. There, you see, the E of Peace is coming just as far from the right hand side as the P is from the left."

61

Who would have supposed that in little more than ten minutes the Christmas Union, the Easter Expectation League, the Social Peace League itself, together with the joy and love of Mrs. Hope, would be dashed to atoms, crushed under humiliation, and scattered like ashes in the wind by a single catastrophic disappointment?

It was Bertha Patterman who dealt the blow, and like other *coups d'état* it was some time in the making. Terrible struggles were proceeding in Bertha's mind while the last hours of joyful serenity were shining on the vicarage and the club.

The Misses Patterman had been away from home, staying with their sister who had married a London banker and had a house in Surrey. They returned on the Wednesday before Christmas, but too late in the day to allow of their going to the Social Peace meeting at the vicarage. It needed not, however, that they should attend any meeting to learn the news of the changes that had come over the town. When they left home, a week before this date, the strike and its horrors were raging. Now, as they saw, and as they could have known earlier by reading the newspapers, there was peace and plenty. The contrast was astonishing. They were greatly interested, and particularly gratified to learn that the change of conditions was not due

to Miss Baker, of whom they disapproved, but to a Mrs. Hope, sister to Mrs. Trevanion, who, with the Duchess of Brackenbury and the Bishop of Stowchester and Sir Robert Wilton, baronet, had cured all evils by means of a league and club of Social Peace. This sounded very credible.

On the following morning, the morning of Thursday, Bertha herself went to look at the club. She examined the big club room above the shop, which was naturally rather bare of furniture as yet, and then she mounted another flight of stairs to have a chat with the caretaker on the second floor. Here she met, of all people in the world, her former cook Eliza.

She was amazed and horrified. Since the day of the abortive attempt at marriage twelve years ago she had not seen Eliza, nor dealt with her in any way except, on a few occasions, long since, when she had tried to stir the indolent woman to undergo the marriage ceremony. Failing of this good object, she had been obliged to strike Eliza off the list of her acquaintance.

"Miss Bertha! Well I never," cried Eliza as she entered the room.

"Eliza!" exclaimed the visitor.

"Deary me, how funny it do seem," said Eliza.

"What are doing here?" asked Bertha, not unkindly but in sheer astonishment.

"Caretaking, me and Blood, miss."

"You and Blood are caretakers for the Social Peace League?"

"Yes, miss, just took the job."

Eliza was perfectly calm, but Bertha's heart beat fast. "I thought Blood was at Underbell's," she faltered.

"And so he was, miss, starving there for ten years or I dunno how many, and now patience has its reward. This suits us just perfectly. Blood, he talks of moving up to some big Peace Club in London, when they 've got them,

but I tell him we 'd best end our days here where we know it 's comfortable. You should a-come when Blood was in, miss; he 'd like to a-seen you, and the children. And how 's Miss Annie and Miss Katie and the doctor?"

Bertha made perfunctory answers. She could only think of two things; one was the marvel of finding such a couple as Matt Blood and Eliza in such a place as the Social Peace Club; the other was the cosiness of the room and the homelike appearance of the household gods, the stuffed fox, the Chinese lantern, the fans, and the sewing machine which Eliza said had come this very morning on the hire system. Bertha prepared to depart as soon as was civilly possible. Eliza asked her to call again, and said it was nice to have somewhere tidy to be visited, after the life they had led.

Bertha left the house, with no promise to call again. She was appalled to think of the Bishop and the Duchess and the Baronet and the unknown but doubtless virtuous Mrs. Hope being represented by a couple who lived in a relation which her tongue dared not characterise. Surely they could not be aware of the truth. Eliza had spoken, also, of her children. The more Bertha thought of it, the worse it appeared to be. Yet she was continuously assailed by the thought that intervention on her part might result in the expulsion of Matt and Eliza from the Eden in which they had found refuge with their fans and lanterns and the stuffed fox and the sewing machine. The sensitive heart of Bertha was torn in two.

She did not consult her brother, for she felt that this was essentially a woman's question. She conferred with Katie, however, and together they approached Annie. A hypothetical case was put to Annie, who, it may be remembered, was the clever one. Suppose that a friend engages a nurse for her young children, and suppose you happen to know, while the friend does not know, that the nurse is a dangerous

drunkard. Should you tell the truth in kindness to the friend or suppress it in kindness to the nurse? It was not surprising that Annie pronounced in favour of the friend.

Still, Bertha's heart was troubled. She was hardly afraid to strike, but she was very unwilling to wound. She slept upon the problem, and in the morning it looked no better. Receiving a letter from Mrs. Trevanion by the early post, on that day, which was Friday, she had a presentiment that it would refer to the league. It did. It begged her to become a member, and invited her to call and meet Mrs. Hope. So she saw that she must cease to trifle with sad duties. She went to pay a morning call at the vicarage, sorrowing, nevertheless, for Eliza's cosy home where the poor woman was hoping to end her days. Possibly Mrs. Hope would take a lenient view, and the marriage might yet be performed.

She little knew Mrs. Hope. From the beginning to the end of the interview she did nothing but give that lady shock after shock, so that they agreed on no single point for a single moment. The two sisters were at work upon the Christmas banner. Bertha said it was pretty, being ignorant that Mrs. Hope did not make banners for the sake of their prettiness. Then they talked of the league, of which Bertha said that it was a clever idea. Again she was wrong, for Mrs. Hope never pretended that her ideas were what the world calls clever. Bertha, already somewhat shaken by gentle reproofs, began to grope towards the real object of her visit, and hinted that perhaps Matt Blood and Eliza were not altogether the most desirable couple for the club. Such a sentiment was rank mutiny. Mrs. Hope knew very well that Matt and Eliza were rough people, but they had crossed her path at a moment when peace and joy were the fashion, and she had decided from the first that they were quite perfect. She was certainly not going to have any one else disapproving of those whom

she approved of. Such a paradox had never been heard of, and could not be suffered now.

So Bertha had to blurt out the facts, in self defence, more crudely than she had intended. Fortunately, notwithstanding her natural distress, she kept enough of the power of observation to enable her afterwards to tell a tale that froze the blood of all who heard it. The terrible feature was the stillness, the sudden and awful immobility of Mrs. Hope and Mrs. Trevanion as they heard the news. The former was stitching the border upon the Christmas Union banner, and happened to have her right hand uplifted as she drew the needle and thread. Uplifted it remained. The latter was rising to put coal on the fire and, with her knees still bent, she too stood petrified. There was not a cry, not a word, nor a gasp, but the wildest shriek could not have been more dreadful than the silence. Bertha had concluded with the words "—are not man and wife, and never have been, no, not for these dozen years." Then, the truth being spoken, the blow delivered, while the awful silence reigned she began to plead in mitigation of the sentence. This she was suffered to do until Mrs. Hope recovered her mental balance. She was then made to understand that she might save herself the trouble of excusing the Bloods any further, and she was glad enough to escape homewards.

Let us now see the counts of the indictment against Eliza and Matt Blood. There must be no unfairness.

1. For twelve years they had lived in that state which must not be described;

2. They had actually lived this life under the roof of a house hired by pure Mrs. Hope with the money of pure Mr. Hope;

3.—under the roof of a house hired, as they well knew, for something closely approximating to a sacred purpose;

4.—a purpose particularly connected with purity and

holiness and goodness; yet they had dared to live in that house;

5.—as they had lived, unrepentant for twelve long years;

6.—thereby becoming bad characters;

7.—with the contact of which bad characters they had dared to sully Mrs. Hope and one of the holiest causes she had ever taken up;

8.—well knowing the holiness of the cause and the purity of Mrs. Hope;

9.—(worst of all) well knowing that they had been specially charged to keep their eyes on cases of vice and wickedness; yet even this high trust had not brought the sense of sin to their abandoned hearts.

No, there could be no mercy. It was impossible for Mrs. Hope to take any but the gravest view of such a case. For, apart from their wickedness, she had unluckily made a complete fool of herself in regard to them. How could she show herself again in any drawing-room in Denbury, or at any cottage door? For the last three days she had told every soul she had met, with all the confidence of one divinely guided, that Matt and Eliza were specially sent to her by God, humble instruments of good entrusted to her hands by Heaven, miraculously provided in the very hour of need, an example of the gratifying response that was accorded to her influential prayers. This, with no end of gushing praises, she had said of a drunken potman and a lazy woman who lived in adultery. It was too cruel. After this she would be utterly sickened of the Social Peace League, and would have to go home to Maryhill, where no one had heard her silly talk of peace and joy, to rest content with exhibiting the sweet patience of a trusting woman cruelly deceived. She could, and would, make the Bloods suffer. She would turn them into the streets, and persuade Michael Jones not to engage Matt again at Underbell's. She might devise tortures even sharper. But, to herself,

the confident serenity of the last few days would never be restored. Often as Mrs. Hope pretended to be grieved, she was seldom grieved in fact. But now she wept bitterly in the torments of her mortification.

Bertha Patterman continued to be unhappy. She knew that she had done right. She knew that Mrs. Hope was right. But there were little revolts in the commonwealth of her soul. There were little tumults of pity, little riots of remorse, little movements in favour of doing the Bloods a kindness. These had to be suppressed. She knew that any deed of mercy would bring her into disgrace with the ladies of the vicarage, and gossip would get about, and she would regret her deviation from the path of duty.

62

"Not join the Social Peace League?" cried Matt. "Why you 'd suit capital. You don't beat yer wife, you don't bet more 'n a little, you don't drink more 'n ordinary, you 'd suit like a boot on a foot."

They were in the bar of the Nag's Head in North Street, on the Friday evening after seven o'clock, Matt, and Harman the fishmonger, Lee and Crossman from Underbell's, and Bill Worley the road scraper.

"Everybody 's joining," Matt declared. It was Harman he addressed. "Why, bless you, there 's tea and coffee every night to steady yer nerves after the beer. There 's games, there 's folks to talk to——"

"Mrs. Hope, ain't it?" said the fishmonger.

"That 's her."

"What does she want meddling round the likes of us? She swears at Joe Carver, like anything she swears at him, for a hiding he gives that lad of his, which ain't her affair no more 'n mine or yours or Lord Rosebery's, if you like."

The landlady of the Nag's Head, a widow with a red

face, a yellow fringe, and some pretensions to a figure, gave vent to a long moan that expressed compassion.

"O—oh!" she cried, "you could hear him screaming all down the street, you could; it was a shame."

"And what 's that to you," cried Matt to the fishmonger. "You ain't got no son to give a hiding to, have yer? Any one 'd think I was asking yer to be Roman Cartholic! You 've no more to do when you joins the league 'n put yer name on paper and wear a badge. What harm 'll that do you, I wonder. Socialist, aren't you?"

"What 's that got to do with it?"

"Got to do with it?" cried Matt, who was pleasantly full of beer, "why, everything! This is Socialism growed practical and sensible for the first time in its life. There 's more Socialism in Mrs. Hope's little finger than you 've got underneath all that belt, and twice more too."

"How much is there in Sir Robert Wilton?" said the fishmonger, rather insolently.

"You let Sir Robert Wilton mind his own affairs," Matt answered.

"Ain't he the president of your league?"

"He is," said Matt, with all the emphasis of a man who is losing the drift of a conversation.

"And where 'd we be if Sir Robert Wilton hadn't come in?" said Lee, the man from Underbell's.

"Not in here," laughed his companion.

"*Quite* right," the fishmonger retorted in a vein of sarcasm. "Let him come in, and some day perhaps we 'll come *in* to him. I reckon he gives you a pound a week of something he had left him by the late Mr. Deane's will, a matter of a few hundred thousand million pounds, perhaps."

"A matter of a few hundred thousand stinking herrings, perhaps," said Matt.

"There! Now you 're personal."

"As you please!"

"I seed Sir Robert Wilton the day he come," said the widow behind the counter, thinking Bobby a safer topic than the herrings.

"Riding a white horse," said Lee.

"Ay, riding a white horse," said Matt.

"And looking fine," said the widow.

"Scowling like sin," said the fishmonger.

"Ay, scowling like sin," said Matt.

"With half a dozen to fetch and carry for him," the fishmonger continued. "Bloody gen'leman that he is!"

"Ay, he is," said Matt, angry he knew not why, "and I 've seen a better gentleman than him, and a worse too, and that 's a fact."

"Mr. Torringdon, I suppose!"

"You suppose right," said Matt, thankful to have a clear cause of quarrel after all, "and what may you wish to say about Mr. Torrenden?"

"Matt, you silly stoopid, if you get talking like that you 'll lose your new place," said the widow.

"He 's learning social peace," observed the road scraper, entering the conversation successfully with a sally that raised laughter.

"May be, but I learned about Mr. Torrenden before I learned about social peace," said Matt. "And if any one wishes to express an opinion on the point, I 'm not deaf."

"Stupid fellow, no one 's expressing opinions. We was talking about Sir Robert Wilton, if I remember right," said the widow.

"Ay, the little cock-sparrow," said Matt. "Took a leaflet out of my hand that told a pack of lies about hisself and looked across at his face and he could do no more 'n blush like a blooming girl and ride on to get out of my way. I tell you if I 'd done half as much as that to Mr. Torrenden I 'd not be here to tell you how I done it. That 's

the difference between those days and these, and that 's a fact, and more 's the pity."

"And you call yourself a Socialist," said the fishmonger with scorn.

"So I do, and no mistake."

63

There was small chance of a serious quarrel for no one except Matt was quarrelsome, and he was not hard to conciliate. The fishmonger was assuring him that he meant no offence, when, towards half-past seven, they were joined by Eliza. She looked somewhat dreary. She sat on a bench against the wall and nodded her greetings to every one.

"Is he drunk?" she asked the widow.

"Not he."

"Matt?" she said to him.

"Good evening to you, Liza."

"I think I 'll take a drop of something."

"What! You?" he cried.

"Yes, me. I 'll take a drop of stout."

"Well, I 'm blessed. Do you hear, ma'am? Will you serve the lady?"

"She 's tired," said the widow.

"Tired? Wouldn't you be tired if you done a day's work like she have?"

"The last," said Eliza phlegmatically.

"What d 'you say?" Matt asked.

"The last day's work. I 've got the sack. So 've you. Sacked by Mrs. Hope. We 're to turn out to-morrow."

Matt, speechless, leaned against the wall.

"Well I never," said the widow; "that 'll be a bad business."

"It couldn't a-last, that job," observed the fishmonger. "Not that I aren't sorry you lost it, ma'am."

"We—got—the—sack?" shouted Matt.

"From to-morrow," said Eliza dully.

"What—for?"

"Ask Mrs. Hope," Eliza laughed, with a touch of hysteria; "she 'll tell you."

"I say you are to tell me what has happened," he cried, advancing towards her in the manner of a threat.

"Steady what yer doing," said the fishmonger.

"He ain't a-going to hurt her," said the widow.

"You keep off," Eliza said to Matt. "Pay for my stout and we 'll go along home together and I 'll tell you then."

Matt paid. He stared at Eliza till she rose to go.

"Good-night all," she said.

In the street her tone changed. She stood and clasped her hands on her bosom, trembling with passion.

"It 's because we was never married," she cried, hoarsely and wildly. "Ah! It was Miss Bertha, Miss Patterman; she come and she done it and tells Mrs. Hope, and then comes Mrs. Hope and sacks us. May God Almighty do the like to her. Oh, the brute, the serpent! She turns us out of home into the streets. Says she 'll tell Mr. Jones to keep you from Underbell's, too. She 'll send you to Canada, if you will go, and the children to a orphanage, and me to a 'ome for 'ores, she will, for she calls me adulteress; may God Almighty find her!"

None knew so well as Matt the injustice of that charge. The last fragments of his self-control were dispersed. Eliza began to cry bitterly. By the time when Matt noticed this he was too much excited to console her.

"Come back inside," he cried.

"Mercy on us, no, no," she answered. "You 'll tell them all. You 're drunk, you are. Stay out here. Matt, say you won't go to Canada. Say you won't leave us."

He was not calm enough to say anything. He broke

away from her clutches and ran back into the bar while she followed him, sobbing wildly.

"Has she the right to sack me?" he cried to those within. "I made the league. I told her all she knows. I got the chaps, I got the place, I got the things; it 's my league, and she sacks me for nothing. Has she the right in law?"

"Best go to Sir Robert Wilton," said the fishmonger, while the widow came running from behind the counter to caress and console Eliza.

"I will," Matt shouted. "I 'll go to Sir Robert. I 'll go to the Lord Chancellor of England."

"Best go to Sir Robert 'cause he 's president of your blooming league."

That was common-sense, and Matt knew it. He was more excited than ever.

"D' you hear it?" he cried to Eliza.

"Ah, Sir Robert, he 's a gentleman," said the widow.

"D' you hear it, dearie? Sir Robert, he 'll put things to rights."

"You are mistook, if I may say it," observed the road scraper from the other end of the bar.

"What?" cried Matt.

"Sir Robert is not president of this here league."

"Who are you and where are you getting to?"

"Read for yourself," said the man. He threw over a copy of the *Cotswold Leader*, a weekly newspaper published every Friday, having underlined one paragraph with the charred end of a match. The paragraph read thus: "We are requested by Sir Robert Wilton to state that he has no connection whatever with the league called the Social Peace League, and, though he learns that he has been elected president of this league, he does not and will not accept that office, nor does he intend to associate himself with the league in any way."

Matt stared at the words for a long time.

"Am I right?" asked the road scraper.

"Read it out," said Matt. He threw the paper back, and leaned his elbows on the bar, burying his face in his hands, while the other man read the crushing intelligence aloud. No one uttered a sound while he was reading. The news, coming at this moment, was dramatic. It disposed of the fishmonger's bright idea, but, as soon as the slow and difficult reading reached an end the widow became inspired. "Give the league the kick, 'as 'e?" she observed. Then, releasing her hold of Eliza, she sprang towards Matt with a roar of indignation that made everybody jump.

"O—oh! You good for nothing!" she shouted. "Can't you see the credit to him? Not to have no truck with such a league? Who 'd have guessed it of him, ever, interfering meddling dratted rubbish that it is? Can't you tell he 's a gentleman, you with your Torrendens and such like, can't you tell a gentleman when you sees one? Off with you, I say; go and tell him you 've been had by trusting to his name at the head of the league. Oh, soft head, can't you do so much for your wife and children?"

"What 's to come to them while I 'm gone, then?" asked Matt rather stupidly.

"Won't I see to them? She can have my bed and the brats can have the couch. Isn't that enough for you?"

Such generosity did not help Matt to recover his wits. He fumbled in his pockets, after an interval of stupefaction, and brought out all the money he had in the world. It was about five shillings.

"Take it," he said to the widow.

"What 's that for?"

"It won't more 'n keep them while I 'm gone."

She drew back with a scornful toss of her head. Matt banged the coins down upon the counter and left the house.

64

The Social Peace Club gave shelter for one more night to Matt and his ill-starred family. On the next morning, the Saturday, when he had arranged for the carting of his goods to a shed in the yard of the Nag's Head Inn, he set out to walk to Coulscombe.

He had little hope that his expedition would bear fruit. His disillusionments had been too many. All that was plastic in his nature took a pessimistic shape, and hardened into gloom, after this last and worst of his betrayals by mankind. He had very few cheerful memories to hearten him as he tramped along the southward roads, but a number of sad thoughts. The Torrendens had been crushed out of existence by a deteriorating world. The Bristows sat on their money bags and patronised the poor. A publican dismissed a potman for doing his duty too well. A Tory member of Parliament gave twenty shillings for an offer of lifelong loyalty. Industrialism at Underbell's threw live men in the ditch and marched to wealth across their bodies. Charity, in the person of Mrs. Hope, was cruel to the point of being fiendish. The only people who had treated Matt well were the Torrendens, and they, like the mastodon, were extinct.

The further he walked, the less he hoped or cared. He was often obliged to rest, being in bad condition for tramping, and he had also to beg his bread. He grew to be numb with wretchedness. He trudged forward because that seemed easier than to trudge back and face Eliza's misery. On Saturday night he slept, without permission, on some straw in the stable of a farm.

On Sunday he passed through Bristol, enduring the stiffness and lameness of the previous day's walking. The present and the future were equally black to him. The best that he could hope was reinstatement, by the grace of

Wilton, in the factory of Underbell's. This meant the continuation of a hated life, even though he earned a better wage than formerly. Nor was this prospect assured. It occurred to him with an utterly overwhelming shock that Wilton would probably recognise him as the man who was distributing libellous leaflets last Saturday week, who refused his charity and scowled at him and followed him down the street with a crowd. If so, what could he hope? He could not expect better treatment from a man he had insulted than from those whom he had served with devotion. He could hardly expect Wilton to be kinder than Mrs. Hope.

On Sunday night he obtained shelter at the house of a village policeman to whom he had told some of his story. This good-hearted man gave him breakfast the next morning, leading him to hope that with an effort he could get through Newton Royal to Coulscombe before the time when people went to bed that night. When Matt had thanked him, and was starting off, he wished him a happy Christmas.

True it was, though Matt had overlooked it; it was Christmas day. Again and again he was reminded of it. In one village he saw holly in the window, in another he heard the bells pealing, in a third he saw the people coming out of church, and in a fourth the faces of a group of children were so merry that he made sure they were going to some unusual festivity. There was never a Christmas but Matt was reminded of his childhood and of the Torrendens, naturally, for never since those times had a Christmas day been different from other days. All the children used to have tea at High Ridge on Christmas day; there was a tree with presents for all, and Lord Torrenden spoke words of commendation to those whom the schoolmaster named as good boys, and brief exhortations to the bad ones. Matt could remember the hymn that he had learned, where the

angel brings the shepherds good tidings of great joy to them and all mankind. Such recollections were sad, for never more would Matt see the Torrendens, save in melancholy dreams, or the oranges and cakes upon their tables. Yet he began to have a kind of hopefulness. Weary as he was, he looked at the houses he passed and wondered if Christmas was being kept inside them. Was it being kept at the house of his destination? Was it possible that Sir Robert Wilton this day had heard the hymn about the good tidings, and would he be disposed on this day, to deal kindly with his slanderer? Here was another fond illusion, surely, yet Matt resolved to see Bobby before the stroke of twelve brought Christmas to an end.

65

When Eddie Durwold had attended mass in the Roman church at Newton Royal on Christmas day, his horse and trap being in the stable of the Citadel Hotel, he stood in the street and scratched his chin. "When do shopkeepers have their Christmas dinners?" he asked himself. He decided that the meal would begin at some time between one and two o'clock, and would last for hours and hours. This was disappointing, for he was hungry and would have liked to go at once to the hotel and get something to eat. But that would not do. If he was to obtain the services of a shopkeeper to-day he made sure that immediate action was his only chance.

Not twenty yards from where he stood he saw the signboard of "Jeffson—Jeweller and Watchmaker." That would be his man. "Probably a Baptist," he thought, "with tremendous views on the profanation of Christmas, and I shall get into another row. Never mind. I 'll be a hero once more." He rang the electric bell beside the private door of the barred and shuttered shop, and presently there

appeared not a Baptist but a young lady of something under six years old. This was capital. "Good-afternoon, my dear," said Eddie, brilliant as usual with his favourite sex, "I 've come to have a little talk with your father. What do you think about it? Has he begun dinner yet? Are you having a jolly Christmas day? Do you think you would do me a great favour and go and fetch your father out here? What! Are you going to cry? I say, you 're too big to cry before you 're hurt, you know. Oh! Solidissimo!"

He was caught again. Just as he was lifting the young lady in his arms and preparing his lips for a kiss, the jeweller came down the passage. "This *is* awkward," said Eddie, blushing in a most becoming manner. "Your daughter was asking me for a kiss, but of course I won't give it her if you 'd rather I didn't. Do you know I feel most awfully ashamed of myself, but I want to ask you if you 'd mind doing a little business in spite of its being Christmas day. I know what a shame it is. But the business is very urgent."

"Best put that child down; she 's heavy," said the shopkeeper, a stout short man with small eyes and black whiskers and beard cut short like a freshly mown lawn.

"Nothing so beautiful should ever be called heavy," said the boy.

"What is it you want?" asked the shopkeeper, who did not like Eddie at all.

"I want to buy a ring. I know it 's too bad to trouble you to-day. But if you would only stretch a point and let me buy a ring I should be really very much obliged indeed."

"It 's not the proper time for shopping," said Mr. Jeffson.

"I know," replied Mr. Durwold; "what I really hoped was that you might know of some other jeweller who wouldn't mind obliging me with a ring."

"Oh, there 's no other," said the man. "You can come in if you like."

"Thank you very much indeed," said the boy.

The jeweller turned round as he led the way down the dark passage. "What sort of a ring do you want?"

"I want it to be made of gold, and to be quite light and small, and to have two or three very small stones, blue or green stones. I expect you know the kind better than I do."

"Oh; so it 's not a wedding ring," said the jeweller with his first traces of a gruff jocularity.

"Oh, a wedding ring wouldn't do at all," said Eddie. "That would be a terrible mistake."

Inside the shop they were in darkness, but the jeweller turned on the light. He opened a drawer that contained rings.

"I say! What beauties!" said Eddie.

"Please yourself," said the man.

"But I shall never be able to decide which I like best."

"There 's other drawers you may like better."

"Really? I don't suppose you would let me get this young lady to choose for me, would you. I 'm sure she 'd choose better than I should, and after all the ring is for a lady."

"Not for yourself, then?"

"Oh, dear no. If I wore rings, I should get into trouble at school. There, she has chosen the blue one. Now, I don't think there *could* be a nicer one than that. What does it cost?"

"Forty-two and six."

"Not more than that? By Jove, then I 'll take it. Do you think you could put it in one of those little boxes with cotton wool and your name on the outside?"

While this was being done, he brought money out of his pocket and laid the exact sum on the counter. "I could never afford such beautiful rings if it was my own money,"

he said. Then he gave the young lady a shilling in payment for a kiss, and left the shop with the ring in his pocket after bidding good-bye to the jeweller in a manner that was surprisingly casual.

After this came luncheon at the Citadel.

66

Matt passed through Newton Royal at about four o'clock in his stiff and footsore state. He was a sufficiently intelligent tramp to notice that the country changed in character after he had left this county capital. It was getting dark, but he could tell that he was in new country. The effect upon his impressionable mind was bad. He began to feel lonely and far from home and very much aware of his imperfections. Though his life had been hard he had never starved before, except, together with his whole acquaintance, in the closing days of the strike. His starving condition, therefore, made him ashamed. So did his clothes. When his prosperity dawned a few days ago, he had intended to renew his wardrobe, but had not done so. Consequently he was in the ragged and squalid attire that he had worn all through the strike. His coat was torn; so were his trousers; he wore a grimy scarf round his neck; he had not shaved or washed for three days; and his boots had suffered on the roads. He knew he must present a sorry spectacle, which hurt him because the bent of his nature was quite towards dandyism. His appearance was a practical disadvantage, too, in one who hoped to get an audience of a country gentleman behind the garrison of a country house. Matt himself had been a footman. He knew the sort of reception he would get when he stood at the door in his dirt and his rags with starvation in his face and asked for an interview with Sir Robert Wilton on a matter of business. His gloom increased, lightened only by indignation.

Here is the picture in the mind's eye of this promising Socialist. Sir Robert Wilton sits at dinner, a fine looking young fellow with plenty of swagger. Opposite is his wife, the heiress of Underbell's, elderly and plain and vastly wealthy because such are the traits of all widows who marry young men. With them are a number of guests who all bear a strong resemblance to Mr. and Mrs. Bristow of High Ridge. Footmen with powdered hair and costumes all radiant with red and blue and gold are serving a dinner of countless courses under the supervision of a butler earning sixty pounds a year besides his board and lodging. Matt arrives and is told that he can have a crust of bread if he goes to the kitchen window. Matt who was not unworthy to receive a parting present from the last Lord Torrenden is unworthy to breathe the same air as a young baronet whose family may have made their pile by selling bread pills to the poor in 1866. Matt's father could and did speak daily with his lordship as man to man, but Matt is turned from the door of the rich widow whose uncle made pots and pans. Such was the brand of Matt's socialism.

These thoughts came and went in Matt in much less time than it takes to read them. They seized him in alternating spasms together with all sorts of other thoughts, gleams of hope in the magic influence of Christmas, or in Bobby's easy settling of the strike, and a multitude of bodily cares that ranged from sheer weariness to the painful desire for beer. In one respect there was a steady tendency, however; the nearer he came to Coulscombe the more Matt dreaded the performance of his mission among strange people in that distant village.

67

Eddie was glad to get back to Coulscombe, for, as usual he had been in the wars. He had met what seemed like a

hundred motor-cars on the road, and these were as distressing to the young mare that drew him as her distress was distressing to him. Of all the manly exercises in the world he was experienced in none except football, and his powers between two goals did not help him between the hedges of the narrow roads. However, he came along in a fine spanking style when there was no motor within hearing, and was home before half-past three.

There was no one in the hall, and no one in the drawing-room, nor was Bobby in his little room at the back. One of the parlour-maids said she thought that every one was out walking except her ladyship who was sitting in the billiard room. Eddie went there. The parlour-maid had been mistaken. Bobby, Jock, and Wilfred were there as well as Marian.

Something in the appearance of the party gave him a feeling that he had better not stay more than a few moments among them. He could guess that they were talking business. As in all the other rooms there was a fire of logs burning here, emitting the most pleasant of scents. The deerhound, contrary to good morals, lay warming his spine at the heat of it. Marian sat in one of the tall straight arm-chairs of black oak and red damask, and gave Eddie a kind welcome, bidding him come to the fire, since after his drive he must be cold. Jock, in the chair opposite, made no movement but looked perturbed and dark. Wilfred Rannard leaned against the chimney piece, a taller, slimmer, looser, and more easy-going copy of his brother Jock; he can be visualised as a young man who wore clothes of a tweed so loose and coarse as to resemble basket work. He, too, looked serious. Bobby, whose greetings were usually of a most exacting description, took no notice of Eddie, but continued to walk up and down at the other end of the billiard table. He had his hands tucked inside the top of his trousers, and he looked hot and worried.

In spite of Marian's amiable words the schoolboy thought he had better not stay here. "I only came to see where everybody was," he said. "I 'm going; I 'm quite sure you 're busy."

"Why not ask him now?" said Wilfred to Jock.

"Shall we?" Jock said to Marian.

"As you please," she answered, with a little gesture that did not tell of a contented mind.

"Come and be questioned," said Wilfred. He laughed as he spoke, but Eddie became rather frightened, being used to associate questions with incidents that were disagreeable. Marian told him to come and sit down. Always a master of deportment, he seated himself on a low stool which exactly fitted his humility among these reverend seniors.

"It is about Miss Baker," said Jock, crossing his legs and leaning back. "It was you who heard her talking after that meeting at Denbury, wasn't it?"

"I am afraid it was."

"How far do you remember her actual words?"

The boy shook his head. He did not understand.

"You remember that she threatened to make scandal about Bobby?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, what words did she actually use about it?"

"Do you want me to try hard and remember?"

"Yes. Try."

"She said she could crush him if she liked."

"Yes?"

"And that he had committed a crime against decency."

"Yes? Go on."

"Well, it came to this, that if he went on as he was doing at Denbury, they would let the cat out of the bag and make the place too hot to hold him. Wait a minute; she said she would make him stink in people's nostrils."

"Did she say Bobby had actually done something, or did she say they would *say* he had done something?"

"She said he had done something."

"She didn't say they would *invent* a scandal, or *deduce* a scandal, or any words like that."

"I don't think so," said the boy.

"Damn," said Jock.

"Is it likely that she would have said any such thing?" said Marian impatiently.

"What has happened?" Eddie asked.

There was silence, until Bobby spoke from the other end of the billiard table where he still walked up and down. "I can't see why you shouldn't tell him," he said; "he 's not an infant in arms."

"The virtuous Miss Baker," said Wilfred, "has written Bobby a Christmas letter, and she accuses him of abducting a young friend of yours called Bessie Wake from a Home at Woottonhampstead and then taking advantage of her unprotected state. She 's going to publish that news unless he caves in to the Denbury strike committee and generally behaves himself as Miss Baker wishes. I say, if there was a libel case, I suppose you wouldn't mind telling your story about the young lady, would you?"

"I should love to," said Eddie. "But what an awful thing to happen! It 's my fault once more."

"Not at all," said Bobby. "And as to his telling his story in court, that 's simply preposterous. So is the whole idea of going to law. Great fun to have Miss Baker in the witness box and all that, but what is the good? The story is a damned lie, but it is the sort of story every one will believe though we go to law for the rest of our lives."

"There you have the truth," said Marian.

So far as Bobby was concerned a slander of this sort was not likely to cause him more pain than a cold bath. It brought his blood to the surface, and that was all. But it

was plain to him and to the Rannards that Marian would not take it so easily. She was to be branded as an unlucky wife.

"What an infernal thing it is," cried Jock in sudden rage, "that this sort of beastliness comes into life at all! What have we done to deserve it?"

"We shall have to put up with it," said Marian rather excitedly. "Bobby is quite right. To go to law would only advertise the lie. We shall have to put up with it, I have quite decided, and really I do not mind in the least."

Here was another lie.

"My dear Marian, you don't realise," said Jock.

"Oh! Perfectly!"

"I 'm ignorant," said Wilfred. "What do you do when you want to spread scandal? What will Miss Baker do?"

"Another leaflet," laughed Marian; "a very showy one."

"Possibly, but she will do a great deal more than that," said Jock. "She will make speeches just carefully moderate enough for the newspapers to dare to report them. Then she will get questions asked in the House of Commons as to whether the Home Secretary has had information of the outrage committed, and so on. There is a special class of Liberal member who exists solely to ask questions of that sort. Then a Conservative or two will take up the defence, to make matters worse. Then it will get from the House to the clubs, where it will be carried round by little creatures that Providence has created for the purpose, and the net result will be that whenever Bobby and Marian come to town or go about (and I suppose they won't stay here all their lives), they will have this story in everybody's mind."

When Jock had drawn this picture of the future, there was an awkward silence. Bobby was distressed. He muttered something not to be overheard. Three or four times he muttered it, as he paced up and down. Up to the

present time, so far as he had given a thought to Miss Baker's threats he had regarded them with the keenest pleasure, but he had miscalculated. He had never considered that the slander she would launch against him might pass through his reputation into Marian's feelings.

"Is it too late to suggest letting Denbury go to the devil?" Jock suggested.

"You forget that we have our principles as employers," Marian answered, in that tone of which she was a mistress, which gave no hint of the degree of irony or bitterness contained.

"Good heavens!" Jock exclaimed, "what a thing to say at this time of day! What does Miss Baker demand, after all? Nothing but that you should deal with these factory men through her as their representative. Why! Every one does it. Isn't it the natural result of trade-unionism? She doesn't ask you even to stop this tom-fool pension you give. She only asks you to deal through her. Bless my soul, if you don't mind my saying so, the whole thing is the most preposterous, crack-brained, misdirected fuss I ever knew. Miss Baker may be unpleasant, but she is no worse than hundreds of others."

"The fact is," said Bobby, "that we are rather a bad committee to discuss this particular question."

"Come along then," said Jock to Wilfred, "we will clear out. You come too, Durwold."

68

As soon as the door closed upon them, Bobby came to the fireplace by which Marian sat. Taking a chair he placed it with its back towards her, and he sat astride it as his habit was. There was a mysterious deliberateness about his movements. He called the deerhound, and indicated that the dog's fore paws were to be placed upon his knee.

So, when the dog stood up, his face came to a level with Bobby's. Bobby took his head between his own two hands, from behind, not giving the kiss which the dog probably expected.

"Do you see Rebel's head?" he said to Marian.

"Yes," she replied, not knowing what to expect.

"Do you see how I can move it like that, to the right?" he said, suiting the action to the word.

"Yes," said she, for the spectacle was straight in front of her.

"And like that, to the left?"

"Yes, Bobby."

"And upwards and downwards?"

"Yes."

"Wherever I want to, in fact?"

"Yes."

"Now you can go away and lie down," he said to Rebel, kissing his nose, "you 've been a useful dog."

He crossed his arms over the back of the chair.

"Well, you can move me just like that in this thing of Miss Baker's," he said. "You say what you want done, and I will do it. Do you see?"

Bobby's face expressed his mood so thoroughly at all times that it was easy to tell when he was earnest in his purpose, whether friendly or unfriendly. He looked full into Marian's eyes while he made this present offer to sacrifice his pride, and continued thus to look at her till she should express her wishes. She knew that he meant what he said and would perform as he had promised, but she knew what it would cost him to yield to Miss Baker so little as a straw. Well aware that his pride was like the widow's mite, the best he had to offer, she was intimately touched. Since he sacrificed his prejudices, she felt the more impelled to sacrifice hers. But the feeling of the moment had a double edge, for just as she looked up at him

to make the concession of her love, she realised that she could not do it. She could not allow the world to look at him as she saw him now, and think that his eyes went roving from herself towards others. "I am very sorry," she said, with her queer hollow laugh that came of a stunted impulse to weep, "I am very sorry, but I am afraid I couldn't bear it."

He simply said, "Very well, then Denbury shall go to hell. I will write to-night and send some one into Newton with a note for Fatty to tell him to take over the whole business and manage it from his office in the ordinary business way, and we won't think any more of the Denbury boys than we do of the fellows on your railways in India. Fatty shall treat Miss Baker just as she wants to be treated."

And here the matter remained until Bobby was dressing for dinner that night, when Jock strolled into his room.

69

"I hope you 're not annoyed," Jock said. "I really couldn't help saying what I said this afternoon. And Marian has told me what you have decided. My dear Bobby, I must say, I 'm devilish glad to hear it. I 've got no end of admiration for your way of doing things, and always have had, but there 's no getting away from the fact that Denbury is different. I can't help thinking, you know, you 've always been a bit inclined to push things too far. You 've never let me have a chance of explaining what I mean, but it really would be too preposterous if you went and spent a lo of money on poor relief in Denbury, considering you never even heard of the lace until the other day. Besides, there 's another thing. And I know this is a thing you 'll agree with. I do feel this very strongly, Bobby. It 's playing it low down on other people. After all, you are a man of property and if you go and behave in

a way that other fellows simply couldn't and wouldn't stick, you 're not being fair to your own class. You simply set every one making comparisons between your romantic way of doing things and the way that other people go on, and the others get cursed because they don't do mad things like you. So the fact is, you 'd be a kind of traitor to the Tories, Bobby, you would really. Of course, I know, I 'm flogging a dead horse, but I must say I 'm devilish glad you 've dropped it."

Bobby, who was pulling off his clothes, took the very young line of pretending that he hardly noticed what was being said to him.

"Have we quarrelled?" Jock asked.

"No, my boy," he answered. "If I 'm going on my knees to Miss Baker, I 'm not likely to mind having my head smacked by you."

After this he fell back upon the plan of answering nothing.

70

"A traitor to the Tories," Bobby thought, when Jock left the room. He had not any particular reflections to make upon the words, but they continued to echo in his mind while he dressed, together with an indistinct idea that somehow, in a way that was not clear, they did not do him justice. Another set of words ran in his head also, called up from his small but precious stock of literary and classical quotations. These were the words attributed to the dying Henry the Second: "Shame, shame, upon a conquered king." Beyond these he had no ideas in his head. He was too bewildered by the strangeness of making a surrender.

Shortly before he finished dressing he was visited by Eddie Durwold whose appearance was truly a poem in starched linen against an exquisitely tinted waistcoat and clothes of incomparable fit.

"Here 's the ring I bought you for Bessie," he said, "and here 's your change."

"I say, how awfully good of you," said Bobby. "What a jolly one! She 'll never wear it, but it 'll be a regular heirloom all the same."

"I 've had rather an idea," Eddie remarked. "Suppose Miss Baker wants to spread that libellacious story about Bessie. Suppose Tom hears about it. Suppose he goes to Miss Baker and says——"

"Oh, you needn't trouble to suppose all that," Bobby interrupted. "It has all been settled. I 'm to climb down. I 'm to be a good boy. I 'm to ask Miss Baker to let me off till next time. I 'm to run away, Eddie."

There was silence while this astonishing news was digested.

"Well, I 'm blowed!" said Eddie at last. "Now that does simply astonish me. I say, I do hope you won't mind my saying it, but I 'd got an idea that you were a kind of fellow who had grown up to be a man without losing the idea of being a sportsman. I thought you 'd take anything. I thought you were different from everybody else. I 'd— I 'd made a resolution to try and be like you! Oh, it *is* a pity!"

71

Of course they were all mistaken, Jock, Eddie, and Bobby. They were all mistaken because they all supposed that the solemn decisions of reasonable people were sufficient to determine issues. Bobby, in particular, was an old offender. Nothing cured him of the belief that Marian must mean what she said.

She herself was not deceived. No sooner had she heard from his lips that he would sacrifice his instincts to her wishes than she knew his guardian angels would meet in emergency committee to extricate him from the position in which his promise placed him. He might undertake to

yield to the dirty fear of dirty tongues, but she could not look at him, even at the instant of his promise, without knowing that something would happen to prevent him. She knew it at that moment, while she heard his promise from his lips. Something would happen to prevent it. The hours passed. The children's tea party began and ended, but Marian's opinion did not alter. She was not going to take any action; not she; but something would occur. She was going to be exactly the same as usual. She was going to wear her best diamonds in honour of Bobby's tenants, and laugh her mirthless laugh while she talked with his guests, and say things more caustic and shrewd than he would ever say, but she knew quite well that Bobby would not yield to Miss Baker. She knew it when Jock congratulated her on the saving of money and trouble, and when she saw the resigned despondency of Bobby's face, and when she walked along the passages of the house, feeling like an interloper, and when she regarded herself in the mirror before coming down to dinner. She had not any prophetic feelings about Denbury, as to whether its inhabitants were destined for good or evil times. She cared no more about them than about the rats in the stable. Nor had she any thoughts about Miss Baker, as to whether she was likely to win or lose her battle. But about Bobby she had opinions that nothing could alter in the least degree. The end might be poverty, or a broken neck, of anything else, but Bobby was like a river flowing out of great tracts of the past, with too much volume for his course to be diverted. The past was behind him, bearing him to where he was appointed to be borne, almost without his knowing it, as Marian had observed in a hundred little instances every day since she had known him. So she was even able to find some intellectual pleasure in a set of guesses. She wondered what event would save him from the promise she had wrung from him.

72

It was at half-past eight that Matt saw the first houses of the village he supposed to be Coulscombe, an enchanted village, as it seemed to him from the moment he first set foot in it. It had a feature which might have puzzled a traveller with more normal perceptions than Matt's. It was entirely without inhabitants.

There are times when an empty house appears more desolate than the top of a mountain. To walk under the starry heaven into a snug village nestling round a church is to conceive expectations of finding human life. Matt knocked at a cottage door because he wished to ask his way to Orchard Wilton. There was no response. There was not a light in any window he could see. He proceeded, and knocked at the doors of another and another house. Presently a dog barked and a second dog, and all the dogs of the village joined in the chorus. But of humanity there was not so much as a head looking out of an upper window.

Matt was so tired and so hungry that he had very little left of those memories and hopes and fears and indignations that had beset his mind upon the road. But he had life enough still to wonder at the dearth of life about him. He would have noticed such a thing with surprise in any other village through which he passed. In the village of his destination, however, in the place where his last hope lay, the impression was such as to assail him with ghostly terrors. At last some one opened a door. It was a girl of eighteen, who in fact had been left in charge of a collection of young babies. She told Matt the way to Orchard Wilton.

Marvelling greatly he made his way to the end of the village, passed through the iron gates, and began the long and winding ascent towards the house. "The quietest place I ever been," he said to himself.

He was too tired to please himself with the thought that his Socialist feet were treading the paths of the rich, and too tired also to consider what was to be his policy on arriving at the house. Neverthless, in a dim fashion, the sensation of walking upwards through park land recalled his memories of High Ridge. "There 'd be the lake," he thought, " and there 'd be the garden, and the house over yonder." A moment more, and he sighed, but not with sentimental feelings. He sighed with relief because he remembered a previously registered opinion that the Wilton household could not possibly fail to offer him some sort of food.

Then came the second of the enchantments of the place, just as the impression of the desolate village was fading from his mind, just as he was wondering how many times the drive would wind and curve again before the house was reached. He heard the sound of music.

He was always susceptible to the stimuli of gaiety. Gay music, like good beer, gave movement to his blood. Hardly had he heard the sound before a turn in the drive so placed him that he heard it more distinctly, the hedge of rhododendron having ceased, and there was something now to be seen also. Both his hands went suddenly to his stomach in answer to a spasm of hunger. He saw, unexpectedly near, great windows ablaze with light. "Gawd! They are dancing," he said. "That 's why the village was empty."

"I will get in there," he cried out loud. He began to run. "The back way will be open," he thought. In the rising of excitement he felt his hunger no more.

73

"There is Bessie Wake," said Eddie to Wilfred Rannard.

"Dancing with Tom Trevor?"

"Yes. I think it would be rather touching if I danced a little dance with her too."

"You won't," said Wilfred.

"Why not?"

"Because it 's one thing to annoy schoolmasters who can hit back and another thing to annoy Tom who mustn't."

"Mr. Durwold," said Marian, coming up. "I want you to take pity on the stouter and more aged of the parlour-maids."

"Dance with her?"

"Will you? She is standing there."

"Why, of course I will."

"When do we leave them to themselves?" Wilfred asked.

"About nine o'clock," said Marian.

From the band at the other end of the hall the volume of sound was considerable, for there were six instruments and six musicians from Newton Royal to belabour them. To stand near them, as Marian had found, was painful to the ears. But a lusty noise is proper for a lusty company. Some one had taken care that the illumination should sympathise with the sound; it was profuse enough to become a lasting memory, for the house had been raided for lamps and lanterns wherever there was space to put them. In the kitchen regions, as Marian took care not to know, Bobby had been generous with an even surer talisman for gladness. About a hundred couples were now dancing in the hall.

"Imagine my mother's face," said Wilfred, "if we did this sort of thing at Tormichael."

"Imagine anybody's face when they hear it going on till two in the morning," said Marian.

"What fine-looking beggars they are!" he said.

"They live out of doors," she answered without much interest.

"Where is Bobby?" asked Wilfred.

She pointed with her fan in a certain direction.

Bobby was quite close at hand, sitting on the edge of one of the tables that were pushed against the walls, swinging

his leg, while he listened to Mr. Kinglove telling what was plainly a complicated story. He kept his ear inclined towards Mr. Kinglove, but he fixed his gaze on the people dancing before him. Each couple that came near he regarded with a sort of vacant intensity.

"He 's not looking particularly bright," said Wilfred.

Suddenly and abruptly the band brought their music to an end, just as Marian was thinking of leaving Wilfred because he had started a topic that was awkward. The dancing ceased; the dancers drew towards the walls. Activity was relaxed amid the panting of all whose rest was deserved, and the wiping of hot brows, and the laughter and chatter of the whole company. Then, also, Marian's spirits were revived, for she saw what was likely to take the gloom from Bobby's face. It was the conclusion of a little drama made in heaven, as we learn, but staged by herself for Bobby's delectation. Tom and Bessie went up to him. Mr. Kinglove drew back, just as others, scenting interest, discreetly closed round the place. Bobby's eyes looked questioning; Tom's looked things unspeakable; something was said which was certainly a blotting out of Tom's late misdemeanour. Tom said something further, and this was too much for Bobby's sorrows to resist. It was news of his successful wooing, as Marian could tell. There was a shaking of hands; the news was bellowed into Kinglove's ear; it was told to Mrs. Jones, just because she was nearest; it was heard by a farmer, by a farmer's wife, and by the postmistress. After this, Bobby appeared to be rather embarrassed. The situation held more emotion, perhaps, than he altogether liked. As for the ring, he forgot it, or judged it best to postpone the gift. He sat still, smiling, while felicitations poured upon the happy couple, and possibly he felt a trifle out of place. There was a spectator, however, to whom he seemed in the best of all places in the world. There was a spectator who did not know that Bobby

liked Tom better as a pugilist than as the centre of this emotional storm. To Matt, who saw it as a picture, Bobby, seemed to be presiding over the most wonderful and moving scene that he had ever witnessed.

So noiselessly had Matt entered that he stood for nearly a minute before Marian and Wilfred noticed him, though the door he had opened was at their elbows. Marian turned because a faint draught reached her shoulders. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "who are you?"

"Sir Robert Wilton," said Matt, answering rather what he wanted than who he was.

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"Denbury," he said.

74

No sooner did Marian hear Denbury named than she recognised a crisis. She was beset by an extraordinary feeling of criminality, for, though she knew at once that this was the sort of event she had expected, she was suddenly moved to resist its working. At the same time she achieved a very prompt command of her wits. "Say nothing to Bobby," she told Wilfred. To Matt she said, "Come with me. I am Lady Wilton."

She signed to him to go back through the door he had opened, and followed him. This brought them to the stone passage that runs along the back of the hall, leading towards the staircase. But in order to gain the nearest refuge Marian led Matt in the other direction, through the door which opens into the dining-room. Here there was light from candles on the table and on a sideboard. To spare the labour of the servants on this busy evening they had dined without attendance, the dishes being placed on sideboards and tables where they still stood, for nothing had been taken away.

Marian shut the door of the room as soon as Matt was inside. She spoke to him in tones of urgency. "Why have you come here?" she asked.

Excited by the music, astonished and somewhat bewildered by his unchallenged invasion of the house through the deserted kitchen passages, and moved to inexpressible wonder by all that he had seen in the hall, Matt had not much coherence left among his thoughts. The sight of the food undid him altogether. He could make Marian no answer. He looked at the food.

"You are hungry," she said, almost as angrily as though she thought he would deny it.

"Yes, my lady," said Matt.

She searched his face with an urgent and penetrating scrutiny as though all depended on her reading of his symptoms. "Sit down at the table," she said. She hurried to a side-table and cut some cold pheasant, carefully choosing what he could eat without being inconvenienced by the bones. This, with bread, she set before him on the table. She looked at him again, and made a mixture of champagne and soda-water that she judged would revive him wisely but not too well. He ate and drank ravenously. Marian, who was not without experience, saw that he was hungry in grim earnest but judged that he had not been starving for many days; she thought, therefore, that she might safely let him eat what he desired. She cut him a plate of ham, and gave him more champagne. Not a word passed between them. The seriousness of the question of Matt's food kept him from any wish to speak or think or do anything but eat, while she, regarding him as a messenger of destiny, was silent through positive awe of him. She watched him, but, in her nervousness, she found other things to do. She poked the fire. She snuffed the candles and lowered their shades. She gave water to some flowers in a vase. Lastly, she stood by the hearth,

opened her fan, and gazed uneasily from it to Matt and from Matt to it. Presently, when his plate was almost bare, she asked if he would have some more meat or some pudding.

But Matt was so far revived by food and drink that he was now aware that Marian was a lady. He was no longer able to sit and eat before her. He refused her offer, and rose from his chair, the effort being painful to his stiffening limbs.

"What is your name?" she asked him.

"Blood, my lady," said he, in a dazed way.

"Sit down," she said. "You are tired. I believe you have been walking a long way."

"Yes," said he.

"You have come to see Sir Robert about some business at Denbury? That is it, isn't it?"

She was nervously curious, and spoke now with tenderness that was quite insinuating.

"Yes," he answered, still like a man in a dream.

"You are in some trouble," she said.

"Yes," said he.

"Then you shall tell your trouble to me. Sit down. What is it that has happened?"

But he remained standing, and the only answer he gave Marian was to stretch out his right arm and point in a certain direction with what seemed to her like the finger of fate. He was pointing towards the sound of the gay music and the pulsation of the feet of the dancers. It overwhelmed him. Though he gazed at Marian, he was plainly seeing that at which he pointed, not her at whom he looked. His body and mind had conspired to produce this state of raptness. As he had passed from hunger to comfort, he had passed from desolation to festivity, and the change filled the sails of his imagination. He was much nearer than he seemed to an outbreak of sanguine eloquence. He

was fit to enter on another of the list of his illusions. He was beginning to remember that he had come from ten years of the mechanism of Underbell's factory to a scene of life and human sympathy which was more than he recalled even of the Torrendens. The effect was paralysing, and all his political opinions came back on him in a flood, together with the scornful things he had said of Bobby whom he had just seen sitting in glorious security, loosely and at ease, among workpeople who were his friends. With the force of an inherited instinct he craved to cast before a man such as that his troubles and his needs and his aspirations and his discontents just as in a few moments he would crave to throw his exhausted body on a bed.

So, while Matt was groping in this latest dreamland, and while Marian was suffering the pains of increasing apprehension, as though a doom was to fall from his lips, the following conversation occurred.

"Mr. Blood, will you not tell me what your trouble is?"

"My lady, I been meaning to tell it to Sir Robert."

"He is busy."

"I can wait, my lady."

"Is it about Denbury?"

"Yes."

"Are you not satisfied with what Sir Robert has done?"

"Satisfied?"

"Yes. You work at Underbell's, don't you?"

"For ten years, my lady."

"Are you in want? Have you a wife and children?"

"Yes, my lady, all that."

"Then you have the payment which Sir Robert has allowed you?"

The question raised more issues than Matt would deal with. But, suddenly, the truth became articulate within him, and he spoke it with a flash and gesture that were

worthy of the brilliant potman. "Payment?" he cried. "I don't want his payment but himself!"

Marian's fears were receiving confirmation.

"Have you not Miss Baker and the trade-union?" she asked.

He gave her a wave of his hands and a speaking glance of scorn.

"And Mrs. Hope and the league?" she added.

"And would *them* do for *you?*" said he.

She looked at him, saying nothing, while he continued to stare his contempt for her absurd estimate of the value of Miss Baker and Mrs. Hope. Marian knew, of course, that he had beaten her. A man such as this and a man such as Bobby she could not have kept apart though she had been the Pacific Ocean. When next she spoke, it was with honest curiosity.

"Tell me; if Sir Robert comes to you at Denbury, what is it that you wish him to do?"

"Wish him to do?" Matt repeated.

"Yes. What is it?"

"You do not know?" he asked.

"I am afraid not."

He was astonished that any one in this house, within sound of the music, should be ignorant of such a thing, and most of all the lady who should best have understood it. How to tell so great a matter to so great a lady he could not think. He could only let the passion of his voice supply what was wanting in his words.

"That, that," he whispered, pointing towards the sound of the music. "A gentleman to live over us, to know how a man should be treated, to make life what it used to be."

"Have you any idea," said Marian, in tones almost as soft as his, "how extraordinary a thing you are asking? Do you know that not one gentleman in a thousand would ever dream of doing such a thing?"

"Do I not?" said the brilliant potman, most brilliant and most simple when his need was greatest. "But my lady, I have seen in Sir Robert's face that he is different from the rest."

It was so like a calculated attack upon her weakest side that she was actually amused into feeling kindly towards Matt for his own sake. "Well, well," she said, "we cannot tell what will happen to Denbury. There are things you do not yet know. But whatever your own trouble is, Mr. Blood, I am sure you will find Sir Robert will be more kind than you have ever expected. You must put all your worries away. Wait here now, and I will go and tell him you are here."

Her purpose was frustrated; just as she was walking towards the door, it was opened, and there appeared Miss Wilton, followed by almost all of those who were staying in the house.

"We were all thirsty," Miss Wilton explained. "Oh, are you engaged?"

"No, come in," said Marian.

She stepped slowly back to the place where Matt was standing, that he might not be overwhelmed by the terror of the invasion, and she told him that Sir Robert would come. Regarding the others as they trooped into the room, talking and laughing, she had some reward for the surrender she was to make. She did what she seldom did. She remembered that she was the daughter of a poor parson in London. She had the right to some detachment. She was so fond of them all. Jock and Wilfred were dear cousins. Edwards was a man whom no human being would not respect and like. She was fond of Keddy. She liked Durwold as one likes a nice dog. But Matt was right, for they all lacked a quality of Bobby's. They were too softly seated on the cushions of this world. Of none of them could she easily believe, as of Bobby, that he

would throw away life's cushions for the glory and delight of life itself. She bitterly regretted the concession she had forced from him.

Bobby, the last to enter, came up to her as soon as he saw the strange man with her. The others were at the side-table pouring out drinks.

"This is Mr. Blood," said Marian. "He has come from Denbury to see you on business. He has walked all the way."

Bobby stood stock-still, looking from her to Matt and from Matt to her. His action towards each of them was checked by a different awkward aspect of the situation.

"Oh, my dear Bobby," said Marian, taking his hand and laughing, "I am so sorry for what I said this afternoon. Mr. Blood has talked to me and I have changed my mind completely. Do you understand? Completely, completely."

He looked into her eyes to see if she spoke the truth, and his cheeks flushed at the pleasure of it. He held out his hand to Matt.

"I remember you," he said, with a welcome and a threat most oddly mixed in his tone. "Last time we met we didn't agree. Is that forgotten? Are we to be friends?"

Had it been the ghost of Hugh Torrenden that addressed him, had the eyes of the speaker shone like moons, and had his voice been thunder, Matt would not have been less able to reply. He had no muscle that would move. Across the tract of years he had come as far as the Queen of Sheba, and at last he was face to face with the fearless eye, the crisp voice, the personal civility, the kindness, and the authority, which were his notions of a gentleman. Marian put his hand in Bobby's. She said that they were friends. At last Matt drew himself up, for a kind of pride was set working in his mind by the very sight of Bobby. He could not speak. But he could show the truth in his eyes and

face. He had found his gentleman, and he held up his head, for he himself was again a man.

75

There was nothing sentimental in Bobby's conduct towards Matt. As soon as Marian explained that the traveller was tired beyond endurance he fell into practical courses and became as dictatorial as though Matt had been born and bred at his park gates. He made him sit down, gave him more wine, sent Eddie to bring Dick Trevor, and told Matt firmly that he would talk no business with him that night. He was to have a hot bath and go to sleep at once in the bed Dick Trevor would provide for him. He should tell his business in the morning.

Nor was he sentimental the next day on the subject of Matt's matrimonial irregularities. They were sitting in his small room, the stone room, after breakfast. Matt, washed, shaved, well fed, and provided with a change of clothes, as spick and span as any other object that passed through Dick Trevor's hands, explained to Bobby what had brought him to grief at Denbury. Bobby expressed Mrs. Hope's opinion in words that Mrs. Hope would not have used.

"You should have married Eliza long ago," he said. "When a man lives with a woman for a dozen years, he ought to marry her. People ought to do the things that are usual. Well, you can marry her still. You can bring her here and marry her in this church. I 'll see the rector and see how soon it can be done."

Though not sentimental, the interview was satisfactory. Bobby told Matt that the business of Underbell's was ruined and that the factory would not re-open. But he said that he intended to provide for the destitute hands and assist them to find new employment. In this undertaking

he would need the help of men who knew the town and its inhabitants. After many questions about Matt's past life and experience of Denbury, Bobby offered him a post for which there is no established name, the post of his adviser and assistant administrator in his dealings with the men of Underbell's. This arrangement having been made, he gave him money to look after Eliza and his children. Upon the whole Matt took away a satisfactory impression. He had met with no enthusiasm or exuberant affection from Bobby, but with practical help and with a sincere interest in himself as a man, or at least a Denbury man, not as one of the poor. He was cheered, as the Duchess of Brackenbury had once been flattered, by the eagerness of Bobby's interest.

Orchard Wilton remained in the hands of the guests until the New Year began. Since the activities of all were bent on amusement, and since no one more amused himself than Bobby, there was little done towards settling the future of Denbury. The Denbury men remained in possession of their allowance, and Bobby remained in enjoyment of his home, for one more week. But this result followed from Matt's visit, that the council of critics at Orchard Wilton ceased to oppose Bobby's purposes. They reconciled themselves as well as they could. They expected to see him incur the ruin of his estate, a bad name with respectable people, and a final disillusionment, just as if the object of his benevolence had been not a manufacturing town but an actress with expensive tastes. But, said Jock, a wilful man must have his way. Bobby thought that maxim excellent.

Really he thought very little of Denbury in the days that followed Christmas. He took no practical steps except that with a dog-like recognition of his natural friends and allies he put himself in correspondence with Father Gauden. For the rest he was among his guests, shooting and riding

by day, playing cards and billiards by night, giving advice about things known to him and asking questions of things known to them, as he had done since he was three and would do till he was three times thirty. With regard to Denbury he had no more feeling of priggishness on his conscience. That had been dispelled by the statement of Mrs. Hope's dealings with Matt and Eliza, and by Matt's description of the Social Peace League and its doings. If he spoke of Denbury now, he could say, without a blush, that he was out for a skirmish with Miss Baker and Mrs. Hope, two pestilent squatters upon Marian's domain, whom he would dearly like to crush but by whom he would probably be crushed—though one never knows one's luck. He was not aware that Miss Baker had withdrawn to London in dudgeon that would keep her quiet for a time, while Mrs. Hope, from the terrors of ridicule, had returned to Maryhill and a safe suburban soil with her banners and rosettes, her peace and joy and love, her purity chats, and her system of visiting, and all the other apparatus of her Most Holy Inquisition.

It was not until New Year's day, when his last guest had left the house, that Bobby advanced a step towards his undertaking. That day at luncheon he sat staring at Marian with speculation in his eyes. The meal at an end, he suggested they should spend the afternoon together. She could see it was no ordinary occasion. He drove her out in a trap behind a well-behaved tandem. With twice his usual care he ensured that she was properly wrapped up. The road he took was supposed to be her favourite. Like a child with a favour to ask or anger to avert he talked of all that he thought would please her most. Now he bluntly flattered her and now more subtly he raked up ancient facts about himself that he happened not yet to have told her or anybody else. She guessed what was coming. They reached an inn that she had once admired, put up

the horses, and had tea in a room prepared for tourists in the summer. A fire was lighted. Chairs were dragged into a position that looked cosy. To make the occasion pleasant everything was done till Bobby could think of nothing else. Then, after tea, with unvarnished penitence, he confessed that he meant to leave her for weeks, perhaps months, and make Denbury his home.

She said she would come with him. He answered that it was impossible. She would be insulted by Miss Baker's crowd or reproached by Mrs. Hope, and either of these occurrences would be more than he could bear with good temper or good manners or credit to himself or her. He said he must leave her at home among the Coulscombe people, where, perhaps, when she had time, she would do some of the things that he would be compelled to leave undone.

She asked him about money. Whatever it cost him to find employment for the Denbury men, he said, he had vowed not a penny should come out of the Coulscombe estate. He thought he could provide the means from other resources, which meant, as Marian knew, from his pocket money and the sum spent on the stable. Scrawled upon a sheet of note paper he had what he called an estimate, an unintelligible and much corrected tangle of figures, which he showed her with some diffidence. She knew not whether to laugh or cry, so pathetic an object did it seem.

"Is the adventure worth so much?" she asked tenderly.

The question disappointed him.

"You 're not looking at it in the right way," he said. "Anything that 's worth doing at all is worth life and limb."

She put away the estimate in her own pocket and made an emphatic pronouncement. Whatever the adventure might be worth as an adventure, as resolutely noble conduct it was worth all that she could offer Bobby. The labour would be his; every penny of the charges should be hers.

76

Bobby sent no reply to Miss Baker's threatening letter. Day after day his friends who were in the secret turned the pages of the newspapers in fear of finding him the hero of a case of seduction, but they scanned the headlines in vain. The blow never fell. The old year gave place to the new, January passed, and February, but Miss Baker did not publish her tale of scandal.

Why should she? When her slow nature swung round into one of its moods she would have been glad enough to strike at Bobby had she possessed a rod big enough to hurt him, but it appeared, from his silence under threats, that he was callous to the minor pains which scandal could inflict. Not being childishly passionate, therefore, she laid aside the futile weapon. She remained in London and professed, sometimes with sincerity, that she had lost interest in Denbury. She said that the strikers had so thoroughly routed their employer that he had been forced even to make them an allowance of money till work at the factory could be resumed, and that she was perfectly contented. But this was a lie. There were times when she suffered a good deal of mortification.

First she had the knowledge that she had been crucially defeated on a point of principle. Though the money allowance could be represented as an admission of the justice of the strike, and though it was for a time supposed that the factory was to re-open with better wages and shorter hours and other reforms, all had been granted in the wrong way. It had been given freely from lord to man, and not extorted constitutionally by the men's intellectual champions. Miss Baker fully realised that Bobby was in the position of a Napoleon who adopted a few of the more trifling republican ideas but simultaneously abolished the Republic.

That was bad enough. A little later, soon after the new

year began, it transpired that the business of Underbell's was ruined and that the factory was not to re-open at all. Yet the allowance of money continued. Worse still, Bobby went to live at Denbury and was understood to be spending his time and money upon giving the now destitute factory hands such training as would fit them for emigration. He was acting with romantic generosity. His photographs were in the half-penny papers. His praises were sung even by journals of higher rank. He was commended both as a friend of the poor and as a builder of the Empire. One or two Socialists, with maddening obtuseness, joined in the flattery. They did not see that he was practically reviving the feudal system and that one of his kidney was more dangerous to democratic principles than all the Budget Protest and the Primrose League.

So much for the public aspect of the matter. There was a personal aspect as well. Miss Baker fully understood that she had been expelled from Denbury by one who was little more than a schoolboy, for whose brain she had the utmost contempt, and whose obvious pride and courage she had particularly enjoyed the prospect of humbling. She made some effort to drive these unpleasant reflections from her mind. She worked at a novel, and kept her usual engagements to lecture at clubs and institutes in London and the suburbs. She even had an afternoon's inspection of the churchyard at Maryhill, always a solace to her, yet it was only for a time that she could keep her Denbury thoughts at bay. They returned in the usual cycle of her moods. Miss Baker never really combated her moods. Her activities were too spasmodic, her habit of brooding was too strong. The Denbury thoughts returned, first in the darkness of night, then amid the employments of the day, till suddenly she fell a victim to the morbid fascination and vowed that she would yet defeat Bobby Wilton if it cost her all she had in the world.

It was about the middle of March. She had received a chatty letter from Mrs. Trevanion, written, presumably, in order that the coolness between them might not end in a permanent break. The letter gave some news about Bobby, telling that he was addicted to favouritism and unfairness and had roused the opposition of quite a large party in Denbury, though another party were still deceived by the glamour of his liberality. The hostile party was rapidly growing, and Mrs. Trevanion dwelt upon this singular proof that even charity is useless if it does not proceed from the right motives.

Yes, Miss Baker knew all about those right motives, and knew the beautiful look that had shone in Mrs. Trevanion's face as she wrote the words. Her own opinion was different. It came to her in a flash, darkened by no shadow of doubt, and she could see a sort of picture of Bobby as he was after ten weeks of work in Denbury, actuated by the simplest and best of motives, anxious to be as just as he was generous, but like every other country squire, like the country clergy, like the officers in the navy and army, like-nine tenths of those who have had a public school and university training, wholly unable to understand the urban temperament. He could not understand the alert mind, the independence, the intellectual tendency, the corporate spirit, the appreciation of rights and privileges, by which a modern townsman is distinguished from a yokel. So, thinking these qualities immoral, he persecuted them in the goodness of his heart. And so, floundering from tactlessness to tactlessness, with scandals caused by the sternness of his discipline, with quarrels and recrimination and copious offence to the tender-hearted feelings of people in general, he would soon commit crimes enough against democracy to make him ten times as much a public villain as he was now a public hero.

No further stimulus was needed by Miss Baker. The

grim mood was upon her now. On the thirteenth of March she left for Denbury by the morning train.

77

Those who engage in war must endure the hardships of campaigning. At one o'clock Miss Baker lunched at the White Hart. At half-past one she walked out into the town. At six o'clock, disappointed and exhausted, she returned to the hotel, sat heavily in the chair by her fire, and asked for a cup of tea. She had not been successful.

Her purpose had been to meet and talk with the men and women whom she had known at the time of the strike, to collect evidence of Bobby's conduct up to that date, to tell her informants to communicate regularly with her on this subject in the future, and thus to collect a list of his blunders and petty tyrannies that would suffice to blast his reputation. She was intellectually convinced that this could be done. She was persuaded that in Denbury Bobby must blunder, and that his blunders would look like crimes against the people. With sufficient evidence of this sort, and with energy to use it, she would take a short way with his popularity and power.

This afternoon, however, she had not achieved much. As luck would have it, she had encountered mostly those who were, in Mrs. Trevanion's words, "deceived by the glamour of his liberality." In the cases of almost all with whom she had spoken on her walk she had perceived this immediately, and she had not attempted to cross-question them in order to extort the kind of facts she wanted. She let them speak, listening, nodding her head, and answering little. She heard of men whom Bobby had sent to Canada. She heard of farms where he had placed the factory hands as labourers to learn the rudiments of a new trade. She heard that Father Gauden was his counsellor, and that

Father Gauden was severe, but Bobby kind. One man, a Socialist, told her with strange pride that "all" the best families in the county had called upon him at the little house in Church Street where he lived with his servants and his grooms. Another said that sometimes in the evening he would walk into the square and make the children race and jump and fight, rewarding the winners with half-crowns. At the White Hart he held a boxing class that drew the young men from the vicar's lectures. All the girls were in love with him, and the chairs in his house in Church Street were covered with tiger-skins worth a hundred pounds apiece.

Miss Baker drank her tea in a state of bodily and mental exhaustion. Her convictions were the same, but her mood was altered. From disappointment she sank into despondence, from despondence she passed to gloomy brooding, from gloomy brooding to morbid curiosity, and thus into the grip of a peculiar temptation that she did not trouble to resist. If she could not have a triumph, she was tempted to have at least a sensation. She would pay Bobby a visit in his most strange of feudal castles at No. 27, Church Street, and sit there gazing at the last of living creatures whom she would ever have expected to be her conqueror.

She would have to be civil, but that would cost her nothing. So, at half-past six, she set out upon her painful pilgrimage.

78

No. 27, Church Street, stands at a corner of the street, one of half a dozen houses that are slightly superior to the ordinary dwellings of the working men of Denbury. It is built of red brick, and is separated from the pavement by a low paling of iron and a very small patch of garden. It presents to the street, on the ground floor, the front door and the bay window of a room. Upstairs there are two

windows. On the second floor is the window of an attic. The gate of the next house bore the plate of an insurance agent. The next but one was occupied by a dentist.

Miss Baker rang the bell of No. 27, and the door was opened by a tall youth in dark clothes, by Tom Trevor, in fact, who said that Sir Robert Wilton was at home. There seemed to be no difficulty about the admission of strangers. Tom led Miss Baker into the room that had the bay window, saying that Sir Robert was upstairs, and he asked her name. She wondered how he would behave when he heard it. He showed no sign. He turned up the wick of the lamp that stood on the table, and left her alone.

Tall, gaunt, melancholy, badly dressed, with her hat and skirt awry and every garment carelessly put on, looking in some ways like a woman who takes morphia, Miss Baker stood in the middle of the small room and gazed about her. With instant acuteness she guessed that the objects she saw had been discovered in the attics at Orchard Wilton by some servant who took pride in giving Bobby a suitable environment. The walls were hung with framed photographs of cricket and football groups that must have been his property at school. There were some gaudily coloured hunting pictures, and some faded photographs of dogs and horses that had probably been his pets in his earliest years. Then there was a number of the objects with which Oxford tradesmen fish in freshmen's purses, tobacco jars ornamented with the college arms, pipe-racks, heraldically embroidered cushions, and baked clay models of fantastic cats and dogs. Of more solid furniture there was a table used for meals, a small writing-table, some plain chairs, and two wicker arm-chairs by the fireplace that were covered with the tiger-skins of which Miss Baker had already learned the fame. The writing-table held a disordered pile of letters. The dining-table was laid for a meal of three persons, and on it were two great jugs of what Miss Baker guessed

to be cider from Orchard Wilton. A number of unopened letters lay on the mantelpiece, in various places, among cigarette cases, pipes, pocket-knives, pieces of string, postage stamps, match-boxes, small change, and other litter. In one corner stood an absurd number of crops and cutting whips, further evidence of the artistic fidelity of the servant who had furnished the room. Let no one suppose that Miss Baker was tempted to spend her time on a search among the letters on the writing-table. She would have scorned such petty spying unless she had been in an acutely melodramatic mood, and, in any event, she had all the sensation she wanted without such aids. The marvel was to be seen in everything around her, and felt in the very atmosphere, that this, of all influences, had invaded the realm of democracy and wrested a sceptre from herself.

In three minutes Bobby entered the room and stood before her, looking so much as she had expected him to look that she could have laughed as she stared at him. That is to say, he was at the last limit to which a hostile feeling can bring a young and well-bred Englishman, but paralysed because the foe was female, and so he had no course but to assume a stiff politeness everywhere except in his eyes whose honest expression of dislike he was not clever enough to conceal. He was dressed for riding, and, on this occasion, dressed well, and it was evident that he had just had his head in a basin of water. He came forward, said, "How-do-you-do," but did not offer to shake hands. Nor did Miss Baker attempt that form of greeting. She looked him up and down, let her eyes rest on his, and said, with a smile of grim but sincere amusement: "You will have to be chivalrous, Sir Robert. I have come to visit you; but I 've nothing to say; I only wanted to look at you."

"Oh," said Bobby. "Will you sit down?"

"With pleasure," said Miss Baker.

She sat in one of the tiger-skin chairs. He took up a

position on the hearth-rug, put his hands in his pockets, advanced one leg, and looked at her till she should choose to speak.

How long he would have to wait neither of them could have foretold, for Miss Baker had come to see and not to be heard. From head to foot she surveyed him with a coolness of manner that would have been insolent if she had not appeared to be in a kind of mystical state. "This is my conqueror," she thought. She was experiencing the sensation that she had wanted.

"You have a pleasant room," she remarked.

Bobby said he was glad she thought so.

She was silent again. It was not only a sensation that she was enjoying now, but a great curiosity. She said to herself, "He is my conqueror," but she asked also how in the world it had come about, how in the name of cause and effect it could continue to be, that a conflict between her and him upon her own field of politics could leave him victorious. To ask such a question was to answer it. She raised her eyes again from his admittedly efficient legs to his obviously unintellectual brow, and saw, once again, as though her depression had been a cloud obscuring her vision, and had now lifted, that the laws of nature themselves must give her the victory over Bobby in due time. She perceived it like the truth of an axiom, to which only indigestion can make one blind.

Thus, well repaid for the trouble of her visit, she began to talk to him, speaking slowly, in her deep tones, and in such a manner that he could not tell if her words were ironical or not.

"Well," she said, "some one must keep up this conversation. You ought not to be angry at a woman's curiosity, Sir Robert, you who are so chivalrous, especially a woman you have beaten in politics. Oh, I know I have been beaten. They have told me all about you to-day. You

are popular. You are more popular than ever I was. You are a conquering hero, and a political genius. You have brought feudalism to the towns. You have learned the secret that all Tories have forgotten for three hundred years. You have learned that a man must make sacrifices if he is to make a leader. You have discovered by a flash of insight that one gentleman has more influence than fifty Socialists, if only he uses it the right way. You have found the road to the triumph of your class, and you have taken it. It has been revealed to the saintly Mrs. Trevanion that you have cast a glamour over Denbury, and it has been revealed to me too, though I am no saint. But, Sir Robert, believe me, I shall beat you."

"Very likely," said Bobby, "but of course I don't understand what you are talking about."

"Of course not," she replied. "It is not your *métier* to understand. That is why I can afford to tell you. And now I am going to tell you why you will fail and why I shall beat you. It is because you are too late. I know that if you had made your sacrifices in the days of the great Mr. Cobden, we should have had no Mr. Cobden then and no Socialists to-day. But you missed your opportunity; you missed your opportunity; and now your class has rotted like the carcass of a dog, and you will keep the sheep no more. Try it, and your class will not follow your example. Try it, and you yourself will fail because you will never understand the generation that has come to birth while you have been amusing yourself with motor-cars and chorus girls. Ichabod, Ichabod, your kingdom has passed to those who have the brains to govern."

Her tone was so much less offensive than Bobby would have expected from a woman who had plotted against his life on one occasion, and against his good name on another, that he was inclined to be less frigid than at first.

"I thought," he said, "that the kingdom was supposed

to be passing to the people with votes, who haven't got brains at all."

"No," she replied calmly; "it is passing to people like myself. Parliament passes bills, but it is we who decide what the bills are to be about."

"So far as my kingdom is concerned," he remarked, "you won't get it without a struggle."

"No," said she, "but I shall get it."

"May I ask how?"

"*May* you ask? Yes, you may. You could hardly ask a more appropriate question. The answer is that these men in Denbury who like you so much to-day will be hanging you from a lamp-post to-morrow. That's putting it in a way you will understand. There will be quarrels, and your popularity will vanish and you will be driven out in defeat and disgrace, and then I shall come back. Why not go now, Sir Robert, before you are driven out? Why not go back to your own kingdom and leave mine to me?"

"There is no chance of my doing that," he said.

"Why not go now, before your heart is broken and your illusions are lost?"

"You seem to know a great deal about it," he remarked.

"Why not go?"

"I didn't go when you threatened me," he replied. "So I 'm not likely to go when you simply ask me."

"Tears after blackmail," said Miss Baker, with her first approach to a sneer. "How unmanly of you to wound a woman by allusions to her past! Never mind, I am not wounded. And now I am going. I knew it was useless to ask you to yield to me. I know you would rather die. So I shall go back to London. But I shall return in a fortnight, or perhaps a week, and I shall find that rope all ready beside the lamp-post, Sir Robert, little as you may believe it."

She rose, smiled, and held out her hand which he took.

"Thank you for your civility," she said. "Some day in the future we shall remember this meeting. Enjoy your popularity while it lasts, my friend, for I shall beat you in the end."

She was holding Bobby's hand, and the whim had taken her to smile at him until he should smile back at her, when Bobby heard a sharp crashing noise from the window towards which he was facing. The same instant Miss Baker uttered a sound, half gasp, half cry, started forward, and clapped her right hand to her left shoulder. The half of a brick fell to the ground at her side. Having penetrated the glass of the window it had found a passage between the curtains, which did not meet closely, and it had struck Miss Baker with considerable force.

"My goodness!" said Bobby, "I hope you are not hurt."

"Not at all," she replied, though she was certainly flustered.

"Come out at once into the passage," he said. "They may throw another."

He opened the door, and she went out, still startled and alarmed. He followed her. He began to express his regret with volubility, and to inquire if she was hurt, if she would like to have a doctor, or a cab, or some brandy, a glass of wine, or a rest upon a bed, after the usual fashion of his hospitality. She refused everything.

"Who threw it?" she asked.

"I 've no idea," said he. "But he 'll catch it hot if he hasn't got away."

"Who from?" she asked, fierce with excitement.

"One of my men is always in the street."

"To guard you?"

"To guard the house, I suppose."

"Let me pass," she cried, for he was standing between her and the passage to the street door. He made way,

obeying an imperious gesture. She ran out into the street, and he followed, and they met Dick and Tom Trevor who had come out by a door that led from the kitchen into the street round the corner. Tom pointed in the direction away from the square, and ran, with Dick at his heels. Miss Baker followed, running, and Bobby went after them at a more leisurely pace. It was dark, but they could see two figures struggling in the road some fifty yards away. One of these was Robin Dennet; the other was seized by Dick and Tom, held down, and probably handled with no great tenderness.

"Who is it?" cried Miss Baker, but she was not answered.

"Who is it?" asked Bobby when he came up.

"The man Murley, sir," said Dick.

He was a man of forty, not of a prepossessing appearance. Bobby stood and looked at him with some appreciation of the way in which his captors had hold of him.

"Why do you break my windows?" he said. "It 's a very stupid thing to do. The next time you give me any trouble I shall have you locked up, and that 's a fact."

For reply the man swore at him, and howled the next instant under a twist which Tom gave to his arm.

"There, you see what happens," said Bobby. "Now you can get up and go, and next time you won't get off so easily."

He called the men off and whispered a word to Dick which resulted in a half-crown being tossed upon Murley's stomach as he lay groaning. It was to provide him with supper.

Bobby turned to Miss Baker. "Well," he said, "I am very sorry this happened, but if I cannot do anything for you I am going in."

"Oh, nothing, I assure you," said she, not even removing her gaze from Murley. "Good-night."

Miss Baker waited till the door of the house had shut

behind Bobby and his men. Then she addressed their victim.

"You know me," she said, in low excited tones. "I am Miss Baker."

The man groaned again.

"Why do you break Sir Robert's windows? What has he done to make you angry with him?"

"He has given me the sack."

"What from?"

"From his — — — farm training, of course."

"Why did he give you the sack from his farm training?"

"Because I ain't one of his — — — favourites."

"Get up, get up, you miserable man," said Miss Baker. "Don't you see, you fool, that a word spoken to me will hurt him more than a brick through his window? Get up, and tell me your story from first to last."

79

In the course of the next hour the unfortunate man not only told his story but found half a dozen others to tell similar stories of their own. Consequently Miss Baker returned to London, after all, with a feeling that she had neither wasted the day nor misjudged the situation. What the situation was, and what was the nature of the tales she heard, may be told most shortly as follows.

When Bobby came to Denbury after Christmas in answer to the appeal of Matt Blood, to do something which would annoy the kind of people he was prejudiced against, and to show that a country gentleman need not be such a fool as he seemed, he had the haziest notion of the steps he was actually to take. He housed himself in a poor lodging by a mere instinct of courtesy, not liking to be comfortable where others were in straitened circumstances. The people of the factory were still living on the small allowance he

made them. He had to decide what was to happen to them in the future. Father Gauden almost immediately won an influence over him, and, since the prospects of the factory were hopeless, it became the policy that the workless dependents of Bobby should be helped and forced to emigrate. As soon as Bobby was reconciled to this plan, which at first he did not like, he threw his heart into the matter and led off with such characteristic steps as bringing horses and grooms from Coulscombe so that the prospective emigrants might at least learn to hold on to a horse's back. Father Gauden drew him onwards. A Catholic farmer had a thirty-acre field to be broken up, and some of the factory hands were sent to work at this under the supervision of the versatile Dick Trevor. As soon as it appeared that farmers were likely to get some slight advantage from this rough labour, Bobby lent them money that they might pay a wage in lieu of his own allowance, and, the priest being sternly business-like, some sort of a system was evolved. At this point there appeared symptoms which made Bobby furious. Heartily as he despised every man not bred in the fields, he was utterly amazed to find the townsmen's defects showing themselves in actual fact as he rode round the places where the ex-factory hands were working. It appeared that many of them were such poor creatures that emigration in their case was out of the question. They could not or would not do the work appointed for them. Father Gauden, without turning a hair, pronounced the proper place for these to be the workhouse. But Bobby could not believe it: now it was before his eyes. He was utterly shocked. He had the tender-heartedness so common in those who have been severely treated in their own youth or boyhood, and he tried to save the poor incompetents, by raging and storming at them instead of letting the devil take the hindmost. Father Gauden watched him grimly, knowing how incurable is the townsman's vice of

working in a grudging spirit and that a grudging worker on the land is much worse than useless. Not until the facts overwhelmed him did Bobby yield to the policy which Father Gauden intended him to follow, and then the process began, so justly feared and loathed by Socialists, of recognising the inequality of man. Class distinctions were set up. There were the aged and infirm, who were placed on a pension list. There were the able and willing, eagerly encouraged, favoured, gratified, and marked for emigration (such is the irony of fact). Some of them had already been sent to Canada, by arrangement with the proper authorities, their families remaining at Denbury for the present with the money lent by Bobby. Then there were the young; there were cheery and active boys who pleased Bobby more than anything else in Denbury, who learned their new work surprisingly quickly, and proved that the uncorrupted raw material is good. Bobby had a genius for putting life into these. Among them, in some cases, he cured the grudging spirit. Stubborn defaulters felt the lacerating effects of his tongue, or, rather than be turned adrift, they submitted to a sterner sentence and were beaten by Dick Trevor. But it was not thus with defaulters past the gates of manhood. That melancholy class, familiar with bad employment and bad politics, poisoned by both, jealous of effort and sensitive of their rights, were cut off day by day and man by man, as Father Gauden named them. It was a highly undemocratic proceeding. Because they took into the fields no more than the unwilling labour they had taken to the factory, and because they would not repent, Father Gauden called for their dismissal and Bobby agreed to have no more to do with them. They had the sad satisfaction of continuing to rail against the capitalistic system and the arrogance of feudalism. They could feed themselves upon Miss Baker's old leaflet about Bobby's debauchery, a characteristic dish upon the table

of Socialism. They could think regretfully of the Social Peace League that had been so rich in promise but so brief in performance. Worse than any disappointment and more horrible than the scandals of Bobby's private life they had the scandal of seeing men of sound character preferred before them, contrary to what they had learned from political teachers of all parties.

One of these outcasts it was who pitched a brick through Bobby's window and then regaled Miss Baker with the story of his wrongs.

80

Bobby had important business to transact in his room that night, so he gave orders that the window-pane was to be patched up with paper and that no more bricks were to be allowed an entrance until his guests should have departed.

A few days before this he had met Miss Patterman and she said that he ought to bring his wife and baby to Denbury. "Thank you," he replied, "I 'd rather they stayed among the downtrodden peasantry at home."

The affair of the brick explains his preference. The smouldering habit of violence in the town was excessively annoying to him. He did not like having things thrown at him, any more than other people do, yet he had a strong disinclination to engaging in personal conflict with the Denbury people. He did not want the kind of popularity that a man gets by coming to fisticuffs with a rude fellow in the street, and he did not think that any such occurrence would be proper. A general uprising of the mob against him would have been another matter. He would have welcomed that for several reasons, among which it must be confessed that there was one which was not very noble. The fact was that he would have been glad of any proof

that his work in Denbury was no longer possible, and that he could leave the unpleasant town and the tedious labour without injury to his pride and honour.

He had fallen characteristically into a life of routine varied by an occasional impulse to do something wild. But no wild deed suggested itself, and the routine continued. He rose at seven in the morning, craving for the swim and the gallop that began his days at Coulscombe, and had to content himself with a puddle of cold water in a zinc bath on his bedroom floor. Each day he had a large correspondence, for his conduct was getting sufficient notoriety to bring this upon him, and he would have needed a secretary had not Father Gauden drifted into the position of acting in that capacity. Bobby picked out the letters that bore familiar handwriting, leaving all the rest for the priest who called every morning to deal with them. Bobby did not see him, for at half-past eight he was out on one of the two horses, Talgai and another, that he kept in the stable of the White Hart. His daily task was to ride round to the farms where his men were at work, to help in giving them their training, to get reports of their progress, to encourage and rebuke, and to find new jobs upon which some further batch could be set to work. He lunched sometimes at a farmhouse, sometimes at an inn, sometimes at the house of one or other of the families whose acquaintance he had made. At four o'clock he was back in his room at Denbury, usually tired and bored, to meet Father Gauden who came daily at this hour to talk business, to report on the correspondence, and to hear what Bobby had learned in the course of the day about the progress of the work and the faults and merits of the men engaged upon it, all of which he noted in a book. He had tea with Bobby, and sometimes returned to give him company at dinner. After dinner Bobby went to the boxing class at the White Hart, or, more frequently, stayed at home to receive visits from

men upon whom he wished to bring his influence to bear. Last of all he wrote a letter to his wife and went to bed.

On the evening of Miss Baker's visit Father Gauden came to dine with him, bringing great treasure in the person of the most influential of the neighbouring landowners, Lord Williams of Dene, who had undertaken to supply work for Bobby's men. He was levelling a piece of park land, near his house, three miles out of Denbury, in order to lay out tennis courts. He would give Bobby a "contract" to do this work, so that the Denbury men could be set to do it. Also, he had some pine wood to cut. He had proposed to do this in the following year, but would give Bobby a contract to do it now. There must be proper supervision, but Lord Williams agreed not to look too closely at the contract while the work proceeded. Further, he would urge some of his tenants to put work in Bobby's way. All this was discussed at and after dinner, a dinner cooked by her to whom a recent ceremony in the church at Coulscombe had given the right to be called Mrs. Blood.

Mrs. Blood cooked the dinner. Dick and Robin brought it to the table. Tom and Matt patrolled the street outside. The dinner ended, and the two guests sat in the tiger-skin chairs on either side of the fireplace, with Bobby bestriding a rickety cane chair between them. Lord Williams was a soldier, a practical man, and he repeated his offers in precise form. Father Gauden, no less capable, wrote the contract upon paper. Bobby, bad at contracts, was better at expressing gratitude. After the gratitude came more discussion of ways and means, of park land and the felling of trees, and after this the gratitude was renewed, for Bobby could not find language strong enough to express it, and had to supply in quantity what it seemed to him to lack in quality. Then they drank whisky, when the hour was late, and after the whisky there entered into Lord Williams a sense of the strangeness of the whole proceeding. He

looked at Bobby with as much curiosity as had been felt by Miss Baker when she sat in the chair he occupied, and he asked him bluntly what had induced him to spend his money on Denbury instead of on something more amusing.

81

"Oh," said Bobby, "you don't understand. I expect you think I 'm one of those fellows who go in for charity. Well, I couldn't do charity even if I tried. I know I couldn't. I haven't the patience. But I 'll tell you what it is. I 'll tell you what I think. I can't understand how fellows who have been at public schools, and all that, let their affairs be managed by the Government and the Socialists and a lot of interfering beggars from I don't know where. All I 'm doing is managing my own affairs. You didn't know my grandfather. Well, my grandfather used to put new roofs on old churches, and if any one put up this kind of roof when he wanted that kind, I can tell you there was as big a row as you could see anywhere, and quite right too. 'Pon my word, if I was a clerk in an office with one boy under me, I 'd manage that boy my own way, or I 'd know the reason why. Well, there you are. I know very well everybody wants to manage my affairs for me and hand over my land to the State, which means the officials in the offices, and I can tell you I 'll see them disembowelled first. It 's a damned dishonourable thing for a gentleman to let his affairs get into the hands of other people, and a damned unpleasant thing not to have your own way. And that 's why I 'm here. But don't you think I don't enjoy it. I enjoy it very much, and I enjoy my own fellows at home all the better when I get back among them. I wouldn't stay here, but I like it for a time."

Lord Williams accepted the explanation, though he

knew that Bobby lied when he spoke of his enjoyment. The lie was visible in Bobby's face. It showed in the swaggering courage of his talk, and had Lord Williams seen into his mind an hour later he would have learned one reason why his words were false. The guests went away. Bobby wrote to Marian, telling her how completely safe and sound he was. He answered a letter of Durwold's, telling something of his methods with the Denbury youths. He went to bed, and lay gazing at the stars for some time. He could not rid his thoughts of the man who had thrown a brick through his window because he had been turned adrift on the world by the authority which he himself had wielded. It was Father Gauden's doing, and Bobby knew it to be necessary and right. He knew that the perpetuation of a worthless type would be ruin to the nice and promising boys and men whom he liked and must keep from contamination. But the act of dismissal he did not like. It set a stain on something that he had kept stainless. It spoiled a kind of pride that he had often taken as his comfort amid troubles. He had never put it into words, but he had thought it out for himself, and had been at no small pains to keep other people from guessing its existence. It held together in his mind as a single indivisible idea, of which the breach of one part would be the loss of the whole, applicable to beasts as well as men, not to flinch from the strong, nor to trouble the weak, nor to turn from a dependent or a friend. But after he had turned against the worthless man Murley he was afraid he would never have that secret pride again.

8

Bobby at Denbury continued to live the life of which a glimpse has been shown, with Father Gauden as Grand Vizier and with the Trevors as his janissaries. He trained

those of the Denbury men whose characters would admit of training, succeeding always best among the youngest, until, if they had not learned much of agriculture, they had learned something of how to learn. Dennet was his groom, Eliza was his cook, and Matt was his informant on all questions of local men and things. He was very glad when his friends would come to see him, and he would take them each day riding round the places where the people were at work. Once a week he went home to Coulscombe for a night. And so the time passed until Easter was drawing near. More than fifty men had been sent to Canada, and some were repaying what they owed on account of their families.

Meanwhile, in other places, there were other doings. It should be understood that on every Sunday afternoon she spent at home Mrs. Hope was in the habit of entertaining a number of the Maryhill schoolboys at tea. She often remarked that these tea parties could practically be counted as a branch of the Purity Chatting League. It was true that the conversation did not always turn on purity, but it was also true that around Mrs. Hope's tea table no impure word was ever spoken. So she felt that it was not really unfair to say that the tea parties were practically a branch of the League. At the very least she was quite justified in calling them Purity Teas. Besides, purity was really one of Mrs. Hope's objects in giving the teas. For it would be doing her a great injustice to let it be thought that she had the boys to tea because she liked them, and, to be quite plain, the boys who came were mostly such as no one could have even pretended to like. But there are exceptions to every rule. One of those who attended the Purity Teas was the youngest of the many cheery children of Canon Langdon-Kerridon, of Cayle. He came about twice in every term to please his mother who was a second cousin of Mr. Hope and believed in the solidarity of families. Had Mrs. Hope known more about this nice young gentle-

man of seventeen she would have thought it simply blasphemous of him to appear at such a tea table as hers. But she did not realise that the sons of canons are sometimes quite ordinary boys, or that canons themselves are not always absolute apes, though it might be their duty to behave like apes in the presence of herself or Miss Agg. So the young Langdon-Kerridon sometimes came to the Purity Teas. He did so on the Sunday last but three before the end of the Easter term, and gave Mrs. Hope a very pretty account of the prospects of the school sports in exchange for a bright description of the amusing play lately acted in the Parish Room for the benefit of the Partial Dipsomaniacs' Home. They had other conversation, the purport of which will appear. After tea Langdon-Kerridon walked back to the school chapel with the other boys who had been at tea, and during the evening service he recovered from the feeling of suffocation always produced by Mrs. Hope's *salon*. When chapel was over he returned to his house, and, later, he strolled into the room of his dear friend Durwold in whose outrageous doings he was sometimes allowed to share.

Eddie also had been out to tea. He was wearing a little bunch of primroses given him by one of those masters' wives who were so injudicious as positively to like him. Had he not been a nice boy to have to tea, or to dinner, or to meet beneath the trees at cricket matches, his Maryhill career might not have endured so long. He was getting rather *blasé*, it may be said, and inclined to wish for a wider world than that of school. His friend found him sitting at his table with a book open in front of him.

"Come and learn your rep." he said, with the morbid desire of saying something original. But Langdon-Kerridon declined the invitation. He stuck to the orthodox and decent habit of learning his repetition as he went up to school in the morning.

83

"I have been to tea with Cousin Joan Hope," said Langdon-Kerridon.

"Poor boy," said Eddie. "Do you feel better?"

"Much better thanks."

"I 'll draw you a picture of her," said Eddie, reaching out for a piece of note paper. "But I don't think it is very nice of you, all the same, to go and have tea with people who get me into trouble. If you really think it over, I think you yourself will see that it isn't really quite what you might call—wait a bit, I 've forgotten how her nose goes."

"My dear Eddie, that 's no more like her than it 's like you. Less, in fact."

"I say, you do say unkind things," said Eddie. "I won't draw her at all, after that. I 've been to tea with Mrs. Winslow. *Hinc illæ primrosæ.* She introduced me to somebody as the worst boy in the school, or the worst woman in London, or something. That 's not bad for a master's wife of sixty-five. I say, it 's funny you should have been to Mrs. Hope to-day. I was thinking about her last night in bed."

"What on earth for?"

Eddie went on drawing his picture. "Hacked shins," he said. "I was thinking of those postcards I got, 'Do you suffer from stiffness after football—Johnson's embrocation—buy it *now.*' I thought what a good thing it would be to send postcards to some one like Mrs. Hope. If you think about that sort of thing in bed, you get perfectly brilliant. Postcard Number One—Darling, what a day we have had together, be ready again on Thursday, your devoted Edwin. Postcard Number Two —Oh, faithless, what has happened, why were you not at the appointed place to-day, your anxious Edwin. Number

Three Alas, I fear the worst, your husband has discovered, your despairing Edwin. Number Four—Still no reply, how can you be so cruel after all that has passed between us, your heartbroken Edwin. Number Five—False and wicked woman, *at last* I have discovered, there is another man! Only you could make it a much longer series if you really tried, and it would be quite worth while making it long because every day the postman and the servants would get more interested in it. Next time some innocent little boy gets into trouble through Mrs. Hope I shall be a kind big brother to him and advise him to pay her back that way."

"If you 've thought it out so bally carefully," said Langdon-Kerridon, "why don't you do it yourself?"

"Because I 'm so chivalrous," said Eddie with aplomb. "My picture is getting beautiful."

"I say," said the other, "I told her that story about your friend Wilton."

"What was that?"

"The thing you said would make her so excited."

"Such a lot of things would do that," observed the man of the world. "What was it I told you?"

"How he has the chaps tanned at Denbury when they 're bad boys."

"Oh, yes. Was she shocked?"

"Rather. I told her the streets rang with the shrieks of the injured."

"My word! I 'll try and make my picture look like her when she heard that."

"And all because they didn't touch their caps in the streets."

"You put it on thick," said Eddie, as he added the last touches to the portrait.

"That 's what you told me to say."

"Is it? I 'd forgotten. The postcard plan would be

much better than that. What the Hopes and Bakers and Aggs want is to be made giddy asses of. Now, look at my picture; it 's simply perfect, and there 's not a line in it to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty."

84

At the very moment when Langdon-Kerridon was telling Mrs. Hope about the screams of the boys of Denbury, Bobby was sitting with Marian on the top of a hill that overlooked a number of the valleys round Coulscombe. He was at home for the Sunday night and was so exuberantly happy that Marian found it hard to make him talk business. He was enjoying everything from his meals up to her company, and when he did speak to her of Denbury, as they sat on the hill, it was in a vein as cheerful as all else. Sixty men had gone to Canada by now, and there were good reports of them, and the families in some cases had followed. But, best of all, Bobby had discovered two men who were so perfect in all respects that he had decided not to part with them. They were brothers, aged about five and twenty, and he proposed to bring them home and set them up on a farm. They would become Coulscombe men. They would marry Coulscombe women. And they would breed Coulscombe children. This last item on the programme pleased Bobby to a pitch that was astonishing. That the children of two factory hands who used to call themselves Socialists should grow up, not in dreary Denbury, but here, where their limbs would be sturdy and their cheeks red, fit for life and jolly to look at, learning to ride before they could walk, and to swim and to breathe and to be honest, was, to Bobby, a thing that was perfectly delightful. Putting aside the pleasure of it, too, he could not help telling Marian that it really seemed a better job to work at than going to Parliament and calling the Liberals blighters, which every one already knew they were.

85

All the while, at Denbury Vicarage, Mr. Trevanion was in a fix. Things were going badly for that go-ahead Socialist. He had been first man in Denbury until Bobby came, and the very sight of the intruder, generally mounted on a capitalistic-looking horse, made him angry and sore. He suspected that even his congregation had fallen off since Bobby came; certainly his lectures and social classes had gone to pieces. He was losing adherents, and those he lost were of the very best kind, so that he feared one day he might be left with none but the ne'er-do-wells and the feeble and the semi-cracked. Among the youth the defection was ghastly, and he asked himself despairingly how he could compete with Bobby who offered such attractions as riding lessons, boxing lessons, football, and the like. His own colleagues, an intellectual curate and one or two long-haired clerks with literary tastes, could not be expected to rival Bobby in these respects. They had been good at stirring discontent against Mr. Deane, in the old days when talking signified, but they could not possibly give lessons in boxing; it was out of the question. So far as the vicar could see, if Bobby stayed in Denbury, every boy would grow up with Tory inclinations. And should he bring his wife the same might happen with the girls.

But the vicar's fix was even worse than this. The real trouble was that he had always attacked rich men, from the pulpit and the platform, because they were idle. His text had been St. Paul's words: "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat." This could not be applied to Bobby, because, as it was futile to deny, he was working at his own inconvenient job as hard as any man alive. The vicar had railed at the idle rich Log, and here was an energetic rich Stork. It did not suit him at all. He could not bring his old accusations against a man who was supporting the

destitute and personally teaching them a new trade. Again, what could be more aggravating than that his annoyance should be caused not by a clever schemer, for the vicar knew Bobby was not that, but by a stupid and simple young man with a mere liking for honest faces, willing workers, and cheerful, sturdy boys?

The vicar might have grounded his charge upon Bobby's connection with Father Gauden, a Roman Catholic, but he was estopped. He was tied up by all sorts of past assertions about the great universal religion of society, and the unimportance of sects, and the brotherhood of man; so he could not start crying No Popery. Again, he could have made a good deal of the pitiful position of those who contrary to their natural rights and in defiance of the equality of man, were cut adrift by Bobby because they would not work properly. He could ask them why they should starve while Bobby had a fine house in Somerset and a quantity of that land which God had given to the people. In fact he did ask them this, with the usual ecclesiastical precautions against stating anything quite frankly. But no result followed. The vicar harangued the malcontents and the malcontents harangued the vicar, but nothing seemed likely to occur in consequence. What was the use of bewailing the woes of the middle-aged riff-raff while Bobby was stealing the hearts of almost all the boys and young men? That was the true disaster. That was the crime. The young were not only the easiest prey for Bobby, but they carried the future in their loins.

Over and over again the vicar was on the point of going to Bobby for a conference. He thought he might perhaps arrange a compromise. He was clever, while Bobby was stupid, which gave him an opportunity. If only Bobby could be induced to hand over his Denbury affairs to a popularly elected committee, which would mean a committee of the glibbest talkers, there would be a chance of getting

things back into the hands of the proper leaders of the people, the intellectual, the literary, and the adroit. Since there was so much administration being done in Denbury under Bobby's auspices, and since it concerned the people, the vicar thought he would be able to make the young man see the obvious justice of letting the people themselves control these affairs of their own. So he would consider the question of going to Bobby with some such proposition. And then, while the scheme was maturing, he would meet him in the street. He would see him on his horse trotting fast, and looking as though he would never care much for elected intellectuals. Or he would see him, going slow, looking thoughtful, as though he actually had ideas of his own, however crude. Or he would meet his eye, and see the look of a man who was used to being obeyed, even through the grave salute that Bobby gave him. And then a spasm of antipathy would convince him that he would rather bear all woes than go to ask favours of such an embodiment of what he hated.

So he suffered and endured, until, on one and the same morning, two telegrams came calling him to London. One was from Mrs. Hope, and the other, much to his surprise, was from Miss Baker. The truth flashed into his mind. Something had occurred, and his enemy was to be given into his hands.

86

"I could not imagine," said Miss Angela Verritt, looking round her, "a more perfect room to hold the meeting in."

It was the drawing-room of Jock Rannard's house in Cavendish Square. It was big enough to suit a meeting of over a hundred people, but that was not the point. If the room found favour with Miss Verritt it was because of the pretty decoration and the luxurious softness of the chairs and sofas. The meeting in question was not to be

of the stern or Spartan kind, for Miss Verritt had the sense to see that business can be done as well in a boudoir as in a board room. Here, in this excellent part of London, in this fine house, in a drawing-room almost too rich in gilt mirrors, gilt picture frames, and gilt chairs, and almost sickly with the scent of spring flowers, Miss Verritt could picture such a meeting as warmed her enthusiasm. She was the elder sister of Ethel, Jock Rannard's wife, whose beauty Eddie Durwold had preferred to that of the girls of Maryhill. She herself was far from being plain. She was rounder in outline than her sister, shorter, more fair, more fluffy, and more eager. Though her years were twenty-four, to Ethel's twenty, the marriage of the younger girl had made her seem the elder. So it is in the twenties. In the forties it is otherwise. Miss Verritt sat on the edge of a chair whose blue brocade did not quite harmonise with the blue of her gown. Ethel, reclining in the depths of a Chesterfield sofa, was dressed to suit the room and looked as though she might have perpetrated this vanity with an intention quite deliberate.

"It may be a very nice room for a meeting," she observed, "but it is quite nice enough for me without one."

Miss Verritt, looking shocked, replied, "How can you, Ethel?"

"Meetings are such a bother," said Ethel.

"Now that 's just because you 're married," said her sister. "Of course girls who married used to drop out of things, but you ought to know quite well that they don't any longer. With your money, and a house like this, and all the good you could do, it 's simply wicked of you to talk like that."

"And the Duchess terrifies me," Ethel added.

"There, now I knew that was it. You *will* think that all the women who really work are old and horrid and ugly. They used to be, I know, but now it is absolutely different.

You know that quite well. You know Agatha Hill and Muriel Challoner and Isobel and Gertrude. You *know* they 're not like that. Besides, the Duchess won't even be here. She 's too busy."

Ethel performed a thoroughly schoolroom contortion which signified impatience and shook the sofa.

"Look here, Angela," she said, "why can't you all behave like other people? If these horrible things have been going on in the place you can't remember the name of, why can't you make the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children take charge of it? I can't see what more you want to do."

"But it 's such an opportunity!"

"For making yourselves ridiculous!"

"It 's an opportunity for raising the whole question," said Angela, "the whole question of corporal punishment. Don't you see? In public schools, and among the poor, and everything. The Duchess says it 's essentially a woman's question, and so it is. Who are the mothers of the boys it happens to? Why, Ethel, one day you may have boys of your own! It 's brutalising and cruel and unjust, and it 's essentially a woman's question."

"Angela," said her sister, "tell me honestly how long it is since you began to feel so deeply about corporal punishment. For instance, did you feel it last Tuesday week?"

"Of *course* not," said Angela. "How could I? It was only last Friday I heard about this horrible case."

"I expect the 'case' is all nonsense," said Ethel pettishly.

"How can you possibly know?" Angela replied, with heat. "It was discovered by one of the Duchess's friends, at Wimbledon or somewhere, and she is one of the ablest and cleverest workers in the country. Besides, what *has* the 'case' got to do with the whole question of corporal punishment? It 's only one in a thousand, every day. We ought to stop boys being brutalised. It 's essentially a

woman's question. And another thing is that while it goes on we shall never get mixed education. That was a thing the Duchess thought of, and it makes the whole question more important than ever. We shall never get mixed education until corporal punishment is stopped, and so it means the whole question of refining influence. Besides, it 's so horrid of you to say No when I told them I was sure you would say Yes."

Ethel made an exclamation that showed her to be about to yield, though not with a good grace.

"The Challoners lent their house for the suffrage," said Angela, "and the Deveneys had the meeting about additional lifeboats, and the Bruces took no end of trouble only last week for the petition about West End Clubs Inspection, and you *know* we can't have meetings at home. Every one has done something, and I said I knew you and Jock wouldn't mind having just one meeting here, when you thought you might have boys of your own some day. It is really becoming almost a religion with us. Dr. Ruth Warden said it was even more important than the suffrage."

At this point the door opened and Marian Wilton was announced. Ethel welcomed her with delight that bordered on excitement. She introduced her sister whom Marian, quite unintentionally, froze into silence. Ethel gave her a cup of tea and opened the question of whether, having come this day from Coulscombe, she would stay in Cavendish Square or would feel obliged to go to her own parents in Kensington. As soon as was civil, Angela rose to go.

"Will you say Yes?" she asked Ethel.

"Oh, if you really wish it," said Ethel.

"Next Thursday?"

"Yes."

87

Angela went out, and Ethel remained standing in the

middle of the room. Her face wore such a look of amusement and delight that Marian waited for an explanation.

"Did you mind my sending for you?" she asked.

"No, indeed," said Marian. "I was very glad."

"Ah, I thought a change would do you good," said Ethel, as if that sufficed to explain the telegraphic summons she had sent in the morning. Yet she still smiled.

"But your telegram said it was something important," Marian remarked, becoming puzzled.

"So it is," said Ethel.

"What has happened?" Marian asked.

"Wait and see. Will you really stay here and not go to Kensington?"

"I will sleep here. I must have one meal in Kensington every day, and I must go back to Coulscombe on Saturday."

"No you won't. You will go somewhere else."

"Why? What is it?"

"I will show you," said Ethel.

She went to a cabinet that stood in a recess beside the fireplace, opened it, and brought out a bundle of Kashmir shawl that appeared to be wrapped round some object. This she laid in a chair, very carefully, and looked about her. There was a small table of carved sandalwood standing by one of the windows. She carried it to Marian, and placed it in front of her as she sat. She took the bundle from the sofa, slowly and tenderly unwrapped the shawl, and, at the last moment, said, "Shut your eyes."

Marian obeyed. When allowed to open them, she beheld, on the sandalwood table, the two broken halves of a brown bowl.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A porridge bowl."

"Oh, did it belong to Henry the Eighth?"

"No, to Jock. It broke this morning."

"You are too clever for me, Ethel," she said. "I don't understand."

"This bowl," said Ethel, "broke in half while we were at breakfast this morning, standing on the copper stand over a spirit lamp. And five hundred thousand million other bowls and dishes and mugs and jugs have been cracking and breaking in every house in England ever since the German manufacturer took away the business from your factory at Denbury. No one can make pots and pans like you, Marian. The ones you make have an average life of four times as long as the ones that come from Germany. Do you understand now?"

"I begin to," said Marian. "Is it Jock?"

"It is. But you must not interrupt, or I shall forget. The first important thing is twenty thousand gross. When your factory had the strike and could not supply the Coronation mugs, the contractors had to go to Germany for them, and the Germans would not make them unless the contractors promised to buy twenty thousand gross of some sort of pots and pans, whenever they wanted them, until the whole had been bought. That was why there was no work for your factory when the strike stopped. Everything was coming from Germany. And then everything cracked and spotted and broke, but still they had to buy from Germany. And then the shops said, if we go on selling things that crack, no one will ever buy this sort of thing again. This is where I get muddled. Jock will explain it. Anyhow, the other day, Sir Abraham Moss told Jock he would order millions and millions of your pots and pans for his tea shops. They 're to be bought straight from you and not from the shops and at all Moss's places there is to be an advertisement to say that the Denbury factory made the china used here. By the time you finish making what Moss wants the contractors will have finished their twenty thousand gross from Germany and Jock says your factory

will get all its business back. So you won't lose any money after all, and Bobby will be rewarded for being such a dear."

Marian was a little overcome, not so much by the hope of profit as by the kindness.

"Jock will explain it all when he comes in," said Ethel. "What I liked was that the porridge bowl went bang just while he was telling me the news this morning."

It was half an hour later when Ethel was called to the telephone to converse with the secretary of the Duchess of Brackenbury. She returned, a trifle harassed, and immediately claimed payment of some of that gratitude which Marian had been expressing.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I have been rushed into having a drawing-room meeting here on Thursday to abolish flogging. It is a nightmare. You *will* help, won't you?"

"Indeed I will," said Marian.

88

"What a very delightful thing to abolish!" said Eddie Durwold in the same room on the following day. He had not let the Easter holidays grow many hours old before availing himself of a general invitation to come to tea at Cavendish Square. "Of course I 'll come to the meeting. I shall support it strongly."

"How very nice to find an enthusiast!" said Ethel. "And as soon as it is abolished, we are to have mixed education. You will have girls at Maryhill."

"That will suit me beautifully," said he.

"They are going to exercise a refining influence."

"Better and better!"

"Preposterous nonsense," grumbled Jock.

"So you 'll come and hand buns, Mr. Durwold?"

"I should love to."

"Why buns?" Jock asked.

"Great causes always have buns," said Marian.

"There 's tea before the meeting," Ethel explained.

"We 'll be the male sympathisers," said Wilfred.

"There 'll be others," said Ethel. "Angela says there will be some brilliantly clever members of the Fabian Society at Oxford."

Wilfred objected to these being called males.

"Well, there I draw the line," said Jock. "I don't mind putting up with Angela's cranky females, but I 'm blessed if I 'll be civil to their male sympathisers as well. I won't really. Besides, I can see through the whole notion. Angela's women aren't satisfied with turning themselves into she-asses but they want to turn men into mules as well. That 's at the bottom of this last craze, yes, it is, and if they get their way there 'll be male sympathisers wherever you turn, male sympathisers in your drawing-room and male sympathisers at your club and male sympathisers in the streets, not a decent male or a decent female left, nothing but a washy mixture of all the worst of both. Now you see if that 's not what they 're driving at on Thursday."

"I say, how gloomy we are getting!" said Wilfred.

"But how clever!" said Ethel.

"Let 's change the subject and talk of something refined yet cheerful," said Wilfred. "Or better still, let 's smoke."

89

Thursday afternoon came, and Ethel had one single compensation for the annoyance that the meeting caused her; she had one scrap of satisfaction in return for her resolve to behave civilly; she was the best dressed woman in the house. It was not that the ladies of the meeting were dressed badly. No affectation of high thinking and plain clothing could be found among them. But dress is an art requiring thought and time. Those who work for

great causes cannot compete with others who have leisure to spend upon their adornment. So lady after lady came, with high ideals in their bosoms and decent fripperies about their persons, and paid the tribute of a little pang while they shook hands with their hostess.

Her place was near the door of the dining-room. Here she greeted her guests and shunted them on towards the table that held the coffee and tea and food, and it was planned that at a proper moment they should all go upstairs to the drawing-room where the meeting would be held. They numbered over thirty, of whom a good proportion hailed from Mayfair and the better parts of London. They were calmer than might have been supposed. They had learned that it is better not to get too visibly excited about great causes, especially before meetings have actually begun, and that the best sort of manner is that which is cool, resolute, and not noisy. This was specially noticeable in Dr. Ruth Warden and Miss Provost, who were patterns of serenity. Some, probably from the suburbs, were a trifle feverish about the eyes; but they soon caught the tone of the majority, with the excellent quickness of women, and all their talk over their tea cups was as calm as could be. As for excited chatter about the grave question to be handled upstairs, there was not a trace of it.

Naturally enough one or two of them had idiosyncrasies. As a rule these were the more prominent members, such as Dr. Warden, who wore a particular sort of boot that allowed free play for the circulation of the blood. Lady MacMaster, the professor's wife, was dressed in a material said to be impervious to the ultra-violet rays, by which means she designed to protect her body against certain chemical changes affecting the balance of the mind. But most of the others disapproved of this, since it seemed eccentric. Dr. Warden herself considered even vegetarianism to be a fad. All this is stated because it is desirable to

be fair, in view of the unjust charges brought against the women's movement. Nothing could be further from the truth than to say that the guests of Lady Rannard were excitable or eccentric. They had taken the greatest pains to be just the reverse. That was the mistake Jock made in his criticism of them. He thought they were silly, idle, women who wanted the fun of a fuss. On the contrary, they were studiously quiet and collected, and were quite determined to get this flogging matter settled once for all on feministic lines. It was grim earnest.

Marian Wilton, whose contribution to great causes seldom went beyond a caustic criticism, was standing by the table that held the food. She was supposed to encourage the guests to eat and drink. But the work was not onerous, and for some time she and Wilfred and Eddie exchanged flippant remarks with the grave demeanour of persons who have not been introduced for more than a few minutes. Presently, however, she saw a face that she remembered. It was the face of Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor, who was to preside at the meeting. Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor came up to her.

"Miss Deane!" she exclaimed. "What a long time since we met!"

It was, for Marian had been twice married since she shed the name of Deane. But she was the last person to correct such casual mistakes.

"It was the Children's Country Holiday," she said, pleasantly enough.

"Yes, you were the St. Gabriel's branch. How we fought! I gave up the work years ago."

"So did I," Marian replied, laughing.

"How are your father and mother?"

"Oh, thank you, very well," she said. "The arrival of a third curate has relieved the pressure."

"And are you interested in the corporal punishment

question? I expect, with all your parish experience, you must have some strong instances."

"No," said Marian. "I am staying in this house, that 's all."

After a few more such remarks Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor began to look as if she had some one else to talk to. But an idea occurred to her.

"Do you see that little woman over there in olive green?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Do go and talk to her. She is Mrs. Hope; she comes from Maryhill and knows no one. And she has worked so hard for this. She would be pleased if you talked to her. May I introduce you?"

Marian was willing; indeed, she was rather amused. She followed Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor.

"Mrs. Hope," said the latter, "I want to introduce my old friend, Miss Deane. She is a friend of Lady Rannard's."

"Ah," thought Marian as she shook hands, "if you knew the names I 've heard Bobby call you!" "How good of you to come all the way from Maryhill," she said, resolved to be particularly nice.

"Oh, I think we ought all to make a great effort to do what we can for this cause," Mrs. Hope began, and for several minutes Marian had none but that labour of listening at which she was adept.

The room filled, and among the last to come were Angela Verritt and three of her Fabian undergraduates from Oxford. She soon left them in the lurch while she hurried about telling every one how brilliantly clever they were. The end of them was that Eddie Durwold found them crouching in a corner, felt sorry for them, and brought them each a bun and a cup of weak tea.

At the time which Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor judged to be right it was intimated to all that the proceedings were about to

begin in the drawing-room upstairs, where they were invited to repair. Those who were near the door began slowly to move out into the hall. Ethel led them up the staircase. Everything was now becoming very solemn.

No one need suppose that Marian's talk with Mrs. Hope had opened her eyes to anything that was now about to happen, for it had been mostly about God and the wonderful way in which Mrs. Hope had been made instrumental in discovering the terrible scandal that Marian was assumed to know all about; nor did she trouble to confess her ignorance. She was among the last to go upstairs. Eddie walked beside her, and they were able to giggle quietly together without being observed.

The drawing-room was cleverly arranged so that all the chairs and sofas looked in one direction without being placed in formal rows. Marian sat in a straight-backed chair at the end of the room, not wishing to be conspicuous at a meeting she despised. She gazed, over a sea of hats all rigid in expectation, at Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor in the seat of authority at the other end of the room. A little platform had been put there, nine inches high, covered with a Turkey rug that matched the carpet. On this, behind a small table and a glass of water, against a background of hot-house plants and ferns, sat Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor, large, handsome, capable, and dressed in a pronouncedly tailor-made costume of grey. She had not been so majestic in demeanour or in attire when Marian had known her in connection with the Children's Country Holidays.

"Perhaps," she said, rising, "before we open our business Lady Rannard would allow me to ask one lady who is present to sit with me on the platform. She is a lady to whom we owe a great deal and a lady who we hope will be a member of our commission of inquiry,—Mrs. Hope."

It was a proud moment. Lady Rannard, from her place against the wall, naturally smiled her assent, and Mrs. Hope

arose from a modest seat on a stool in the forefront. Jock put a chair on the platform for her use, and gave her his hand as she mounted the nine honourable inches above the level of the floor. She blushed, and looked prettily pleased yet free from vulgar exultation. She could not help feeling that this small step above the floor was symbolising a step much higher and greater and more important in her power to exert influence for good.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor," she said, before sitting down, "I really did not wish to be on the platform, but of course I can quite see we ought all to feel how very important the discoveries were, but I think I ought to say that I feel we ought to be most grateful of all to the Duchess of Brackenbury, who was so very kind about arranging this meeting. We all owe her a very great deal indeed. I do feel I ought to say that before I sit down, and so I am very glad I have said it."

She sat. There had been no clapping when she stepped on to the platform, partly because people were curious to see her, and partly because of the solemnity and importance of the occasion. But the prettiness and modesty and pleasantness of Mrs. Hope touched the good nature of the audience, and now, as she took her seat, there was some muffled clapping of gloved hands and a murmur of Hear Hear. And, to use her own phraseology, we ought all to be glad that she received this slight tribute.

"It will help matters if I make a preliminary announcement," said Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor. "Our subject is really two-fold. There is the question of corporal punishment as a whole, and also the question of the particular scandalous case that we propose to ventilate and deal with and which we propose to send a commission of enquiry to investigate on the spot. It think it will be best if we take the particular case first. But to begin with, I wish to say a few words upon the broad aspects of the subject. It is, without any

doubt, essentially a woman's question. (Applause.) What I say to you to-day is that we are going to settle it. Whether we obtain the suffrage (Applause) or whether we do not, we will push this question until we have an Act of Parliament to settle it. I am perfectly certain we shall win. We shall win because the spirit of the times is with us. We who are gathered in this room of Lady Rannard's represent the cause of the refinement of life, the cause of progress and humanity and pity and tenderness and spirituality. So I say it is essentially a woman's question. (Applause.) We shall not yield. We shall abolish this brutalising and degrading form of punishment which is already practically extinct in every progressive country but our own. I say we shall not yield. We shall uphold our banner and fight while there is breath in our bodies. (Loud applause.) Faint we may be, but still we shall pursue, with valour and courage. We shall not bear the sword in vain. I know that the reactionaries will tell us that many good and enlightened men were brought up under this form of punishment in the past, but I want to say that that is utterly beside the point. The world advances, and we must advance with it. (Applause.) Abuses must be rooted out, and the rooting out of abuses is obviously a woman's question. And now I am going to deal with the particular case we have heard of. Ladies, I shall almost shock you when I say that I am positively glad that that case has occurred. The blood and cries of those little martyrs will light a candle that will never be blown out. (Subdued applause.) Of course we must be perfectly dispassionate, and I do not wish to dwell on the horrible details. But I say that they were as truly martyrs in the cause of refinement and spirituality as any that we read of in the dark ages. Let us honour them. (Applause) Before I read you the papers I have here I should like to say that Mrs. Hope, who made the discovery, had for years been one of the most able and active

investigators we have amongst us, and the whole case has been thoroughly examined by some of the most able and brilliant women in the world. And now, in order that you may know the kind of man it is we have to deal with, I will read you some account of the career of this man whom I am not afraid to call an inhuman brute, this torturer of little children, who might have continued to perpetrate his cruelties for years and years but for the courageous and brave and fearless intervention of Mrs. Hope."

Thus far in safety. Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor now paused and hunted for something in a satin bag coloured blue to match the feather in her hat. The audience waited. That the same speech may have different effects on different minds must be due to the divine spark in our nature, for the criticism of beasts is generally unanimous on any point. Here there was divergence. Those in whom the divine spark glowed brightest were deeply moved by the speech. Some indeed saw that neither blood nor cries will light a candle, and that Latimer was referring to the blazing fagots and his own burning body. But that was a small point. The speech as a whole seemed very able and conclusive, courageous in its challenge, and quite worthy of one of the noblest causes that man or woman could have undertaken to serve. Others, however, were not pleased. Ethel Rannard sat fixedly gazing at the rings on one of her fingers, twisting them round with a sure conviction that there was something grotesque about the whole affair. Her husband was consumed from first to last by an inwardly raging impatience. Wilfred sat gazing at his boot, occasionally stroking his upper lip, and troubled with recurring spasms of mirth. As for Marian at the back, she was like an atheistic governess at family prayers, her hands in her lap, her face expressionless, her gaze upon the speaker, and her mind inquiring lazily why some women at forty and

fifty have not shed the nonsense she had banished at nineteen. That was how it appeared to her.

And now there came a telling pause of expectation. Out of her reticule Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor brought a scent bottle, a lace pocket-handkerchief, and a gold mounted fountain pen. She laid these on the table. Then, with just perceptible relief, she found what she wanted, a folded piece of note paper. She put down the bag, opened out the piece of note paper, and flattened it on the table so as to make it more easy to read. There was a hush of awe and suspense as she lifted it towards her eyes.

At this point it should be said that no one had enjoyed the proceedings more thoroughly than Eddie Durwold. Modestly seated on a stool by the fireplace he had found everything quite amusing from the first. Corporal punishment was an institution to which he owed his escape from worse calamities, and he knew more about it than any other person present. So, behind a face of tolerable gravity, he was amused to hear the glib opinions of Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor on the subject. He was amused also to find himself in the same room with Mrs. Hope and Miss Baker. He had only to look round him to see many other ladies whom a closer acquaintance would probably show to be quite as funny from his point of view. He had never yet realised how funny his favourite sex could be. New vistas of comedy were opening before his young eyes; down one vista was Miss Challoner's determined jaw; Dr. Warden's boots down another, Lady MacMaster's intellectual brow down a third, and everywhere a ludicrous solemnity. Yet. up to now, he had not the least suspicion of the heights to which comedy was rising. He had not realised that all he beheld, the defiant challenge to flogging, the unspeakable outrage to be exposed, the mighty campaign to be conducted, the solemnity, the enthusiasm, the righteous ardour, the holy wrath, were his own creations, the fruits of his own

small joke. He had not realised that the tree on which these fluttering ladies perched was sprung from the seed he had sown in an all too fertile soil.

The truth was revealed in a flash, in the first sentence with which Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor resumed her speech.

"Sir Robert Wilton," she began, "who now amuses himself with the screams of little children, is the same young gentleman who in 1905 deceived and ruined an innocent girl while he was an undergraduate at Oxford."

It need hardly be said that the effect on some who heard these words was to take their breath away. Such is the vagueness with which many women talk, about some one who has done something somewhere, that quite a good proportion of those present, even of the enthusiasts, had not known who was the brutal employer, or whom he had flogged, or why, or when, or how. They left such points to their leaders. Ethel Rannard herself had never thought of asking Angela for details of that kind. Jock and Wilfred were too scornful towards the whole affair. And thus it happened that the startling announcement about Bobby was made in the presence of his wife and three of his fondest kinsfolk without their being warned by even the faintest shadow of suspicion. Their heads rose simultaneously, as though touched by the same electric current, and their faces assumed exactly the same expression of blank amazement.

Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor, who of course did not notice this, proceeded to give an account of Bobby's career at Eton and at Oxford as it was written on the tablets of Miss Baker's imagination. She spoke of his having corrupted his fellow creatures at each place, and drew his picture as a most revolting sort of reprobate. She passed on to brand him as a tyrannical squire at Coulscombe, and the story of Bessie Wake was not forgotten. From her references to his parliamentary candidature it appeared that the political

sympathies of Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor were, alas, Conservative. She deplored the disgrace of her party in such a man as Bobby. All that she said had the rhetorical purpose of magnifying the horror of the affair, for it was worse that little children should be tortured by a bad man than by a good one.

Now that Eddie understood the position the shock nearly killed him. It was weeks since he had even thought of the tale he had told Langdon-Kerridon to repeat to Mrs. Hope at tea, and he awoke to find that he had victimised the legions of the women of England. Had Langdon-Kerridon been present, nothing could have prevented them from rolling on the floor together in the extremity of their joy. As it was, Eddie gasped, went pale, and controlled himself. Three or four times he withstood the volume of his amusement breaking like the waves of the sea upon him, and then there was a reaction in which he was positively awed by the magnitude of his achievement. But amusement returned, for the funniest thing of all was that even after he realised the joke the meeting went on as solemn and important as before. He heard the terrible account of Bobby's crimes, and the murmurs of horror from the audience. He heard it explained that Bobby had not merely a cruel disposition but a passion for cruelty in the nature of a carnal lust. England would ring with it. Questions in Parliament would be followed by a campaign throughout the country. Legislation would be introduced. Overwhelming public feeling would carry the Flogging Bill to triumph. But first of all a women's commission was to visit the monster in his own den at four o'clock on Saturday, for which visit an appointment had been already made, and Eddie judged that they would then give him a piece of their mind. Now Eddie himself had the kind of bones that hard words do not break, nor did he suppose that they would break Bobby's. The fouler the accusations, the more he

was amused. The larger the publicity threatened, the more enormous was the comedy. He had not a misgiving until he chanced to turn his head towards the back of the room and saw the face of Marian Wilton wearing an expression that showed him a new aspect of what he had done. Even while he was looking at her, perceiving a tragedy in his comedy, she rose, rather unsteadily, and left the room by the door near which she had been sitting.

Now he thought of it, he could understand why the joke was not pleasing her as much as him. The aspect of affairs changed completely. Disrespectful as were his feelings towards the assembled women of England he had some regard for one like Marian who had been his hostess on several occasions, and so it inconveniently happened that just as he realised that his joke would end in his neck being wrung by Bobby he also realised that he would have to own up at once. He looked for Jock, and saw that he had crossed over and was whispering to Ethel. Eddie went across the room and joined them. In the space of about twenty seconds, with his usual calmness, he had made Jock understand the origin of Mrs. Hope's sensational discoveries.

"You invented the whole thing?" Jock asked him.

"I 'm afraid I did," he said, "or, at least, I exaggerated."

Jock made no comment, but after a moment, told him to go to the landing outside the room. He whispered to Ethel who, with him, followed Eddie out of the room. Wilfred came too. Outside, at the top of the staircase, Jock frigidly told Eddie to repeat his statement. He obeyed, not thinking it worth while at present to add his apologies. Ethel then said that she must go at once to Marian. She supposed rightly that Marian was in her bedroom, and went upstairs, leaving the others on the landing with the thin hum of Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor's voice just audible through the drawing-room door. Eddie was pale, in dire disgrace with Jock, but cheered by a smile from Wilfred to whom

alone it occurred that the comic side still existed. With bated breath he spoke of the scene that would occur in the drawing-room when the women of England were told that they had all walked into a trap set by a schoolboy for poor little Mrs. Hope of Maryh ll. But Jock told Wilfred to go back and hear what the meeting was doing.

After five minutes Ethel came downstairs looking as though her experiences had been distressing.

"Oh, Jock, she is going to make it so tragic," she said. "She says we won't say anything now but let them go to Denbury and have their inquiry. And I know it would be so much better to stop it now without any fuss."

"Didn't you tell her what Durwold says?" Jock asked.

"Yes, but she doesn't care, she says they shall have their inquiry."

"What does she mean?"

"She means to make them suffer for it, don't you see; she 's too angry for words. She doesn't pay attention when I talk, so do please go and tell her not to. Persuade her to let us stop it all now."

Jock ran upstairs upon an errand of which he little knew the difficulty. As for Eddie, it dawned upon him that the trap he had set might be held open by Marian till the victims were far more firmly fixed in it. Marian and he might become collaborators strangely enough. He waited with Ethel, who, being incapable of unkindness, had no choice but to be nice to him. Meanwhile, in the drawing-room Mrs. Fyfe-Proctor gave place to a speaker yet more resolute than herself. They chose the members of the commission that was to go to Denbury and beard the monster and get written statements from his victims. They arranged to meet again on the following Tuesday to hear the commission's report. Having set up this gibbet for Bobby, they formed themselves into the W. E. L. M., or Women's Emergency League of Mercy, while Bobby's

wife upstairs was firmly declining to show any mercy to them.

"The fact is," said Jock, as he joined Ethel on the landing, "that these women have put their feet in it this time. They 've gone on the rampage once too often. This time they have *done* it."

90

Before the ladies left Cavendish Square their chairman warned them to keep their great cause secret until after the commission had reported. She never spoke a wiser word. However, in some strange way, the information leaked out.

Among those who heard of it was Mr. Hopkinson, the Unionist member for South Hertfordshire, who had once interested himself in the Denbury strike. He was prominent on the committee of the True Progress Club, a very exclusive body, Unionist in politics, and strictly preserved for persons who were or had been members of parliament or candidates.

Though the club liked its members to be clever and smart and up to date it was so broad-minded that it had elected a certain number of the most ordinary sort of people. It had elected Bobby. That happened long ago, when Bobby knew even less about politics than he knew at the time of this story, and it was partly due to some one's mistake in thinking that he was clever because he had been at a certain Oxford college. Since that date, Mr. Hopkinson and others, looking over the list of the club, had often wanted to get rid of him. They did not think he brought the club much credit. This feeling had grown strongly since the Denbury affair began. It was bad enough when Bobby had seemed likely to be a scandalous sort of employer, but it became much worse when he blundered into virtue in exactly the way most sure to annoy the Socialists. His discrimination between the good fellows and the bad fellows

at Denbury might be right in theory, but in practical politics it would be unpopular and not at all progressive. And it was the kind of thing that might attract some attention. So the next time Mr. Hopkinson and his committee were looking over the list of the club they stopped at Bobby's name and wished all the more that they could get rid of him and clear themselves of all shadow of complicity.

But the world is busy, and Bobby was so unimportant that they forgot him. When, however, Mr. Hopkinson got wind of the approaching flogging scandal, the matter became more urgent. It was not that Mr. Hopkinson believed the scandals to be based on fact. On the contrary, he was sure they were a fine mare's nest, and he was able to judge shrewdly because he was on the committee of a Unionist League for Woman Suffrage and knew all about progressive ladies. But still, the very contradiction of the charges would bring Bobby and Denbury into prominence and expose his very foolish and injudicious policy towards his dependents in that town.

By a stroke of good fortune he met a political friend who was going to spend Easter at a house in Gloucestershire not twenty miles from Denbury in order to devote some study to the typical agricultural labourer. This friend, a Mr. Pawsley, kindly promised to call on Bobby and ask him in the nicest way to send his resignation to the True Progress Club. Mr. Hopkinson wanted everything to be done nicely, not offensively or inconsiderately. Mr. Pawsley therefore wrote Bobby a pleasant note asking if he might have a chat with him in Denbury. The answer came by return of post, making an appointment at the White Hart for four o'clock on Saturday. But the note was not written or signed by Bobby. It was signed "C. Gauden." Mr. Pawsley supposed C. Gauden to be a secretary, which was a guess not far from the truth.

91

There were others, also, who heard about the flogging scandal, for it followed a course like a genealogical tree, spreading more widely as it went further. It came to the ears of convinced humanitarians, who were ready to let ruin overtake all the world and its soul rather than permit pain of the physical variety. It came to the ears of earnest Liberal politicians, who felt bound to mention it in their speeches not supposing that Marian would have them sued for damages. It came to the ears of ladies whose one wish was to put everything to rights, who felt unanimously that something should be done without any delay whatever. It came to the ears of people of refinement, who thought that a full exposure was required. It came to the ears of journalists, who saw how terribly and painfully it would shock the public conscience, but waited, nevertheless, for a while. And it reached some peppery old colonels, and some fashionable women with cool heads, and some cynical young men, and some ordinary people who did not set up for being anything in particular, all of whom in their various manners said, "Pooh-pooh! The thing is ridiculous!"

The world is such a nice place, fortunately, that most of those who heard the story were sure that there must be some mistake about it, somewhere. But there were a noticeable number who took it with no misgivings. Marian, as she sat planning vengeance in the coolness of her malice, would have been glad to know that those who sided against Bobby were mostly persons who had both money and reputation to lose in the courts. But if the courts were put aside, and if Bobby's good name were alone considered, it would have seemed lamentable that his detractors were of all people the most earnest, the best-intentioned, and the most advanced.

92

One of these was a Mr. Colquhoun, who heard the news for the simple reason that his sister had been at the meeting. He was on the Cotswolds conducting a reading party of religious but powerful young men from the Oxford college of which he was the chaplain, and he told them what he thought about it.

"Perhaps you don't remember this Master Wilton," he said, "but I do. Oxford said good-bye to him before your time. I can remember the young gentleman *very* clearly, and that 's one of the advantages of getting on in years. And I can tell you fellows, too, I remember the days when it wouldn't have been left to a pack of women to show him what they think of him. If you lads had the guts of boiled rabbits, you 'd bike over to what 's its name and have him tarred and feathered. If any one gave a lead, I dare say the local Johnnies wouldn't be sorry to join in."

As the reading party took a holiday on Saturday, it seemed that some enterprise of this description might indeed repay the trouble involved.

93

Last but not least there was Miss Baker. She well knew how prone was Mrs. Hope to make mistakes. Nor did she wish to be led into a piece of foolishness. But she judged the question on its merits, with the private information that she had, balancing the improbability of Bobby being inhumane against the probability of his being more drastic than the public likes. Was she to lose the golden opportunity held out by the second alternative? Not she; if the tales were false, the blame was Mrs. Hope's, and she would shrug her shoulders. But if they had truth up to the required percentage, she would not be long in outstripping Mrs.

Fyfe-Proctor in the use that she would make of them. Life is a lottery, thought Miss Baker, and she joined the Commission of Inquiry.

94

The morning of the day that was to bring so many influential foes on Bobby saw him lying in bed at his house, No. 27, Church Street, Denbury, considering a question very deeply. He had slept well, as he did on all occasions without any exception whatsoever, but among the letters that Dick Trevor brought him with his tea and his bath in the morning there was one that provoked his most earnest thought. It was the only one he had read, because it was the only one that bore the handwriting of a friend. The rest had been tossed aside and would later be extracted from the bedclothes and handed by Dick to Father Gauden.

The letter that Bobby read was from Jock. Just as a man will go on looking at the hands of his watch, if the time it tells surprises him, so Bobby went on looking at Jock's concise statement of a single fact. With his head on his hand and his elbow on his pillow and in his eyes a gravity that was absurd considering the nature of the news, he let it sink into his mind that Underbell's factory was not going to keep its doors closed for ever. The manufacture of pottery was to start again. Denbury, it appeared, was not to be a financial loss to him and Marian, after all, but was to be the source of a continuing and appreciable income. This was the news.

It was clear that the influence of Jock's friends in business had had something to do with the matter, and Bobby's first thought was to compare the excellence of Jock with the defects of all sorts of other people whom he could call to mind if he liked, and to take pleasure in the fact that help had not come from a stranger but from a fellow who had

got into rows with him at school and was a cousin and brother-in-law of Marian's. That was just as it should be, making gratitude delightful, but the seriousness of the matter, the thought that made Bobby look so seraphically grave that he could have won prizes at a show of choir boys, was that Denbury was to be no passing incident as he had supposed, but was to continue in his life to the end. To him it was perfectly clear that he would now have to build a house near the town, live here for several months in the year, and bring up his second son as a manufacturer of pots and pans.

His problem was to say whether he liked the news or not. He liked the money, for he was human. But he did not like Denbury. Yet he knew that his dislike of Denbury was largely a dislike of the poky house he had lived in, which had irritated him perpetually and been the very centre of his small martyrdom in the late months. He craved for rooms of the area of those at Orchard Wilton. And, similarly, he disliked the people because he craved for the people of Coulscombe whose virtues and vices he knew and understood and liked. Yet there was a doubt. He was coming to think that the younger people at Denbury, and some of the elder who had been in the army, or had had certain experiences, were not so different from his Coulscombe boys after all. He could not be sure, for he would look at them and they would look at him, and no message passed to say if it was peace or war. Whichever it was, they were to be his now, after Jock's letter, while he lived. He had a strong desire to confide in some one. He wanted the opinion of some one who would understand his position. He would not, if he could, undo what he had done in Denbury up to the present, because he had been doing the things he liked. He had been doing what called for courage and defiance. But he could not picture the prolongation or perpetuation of an affair so adventurous and spasmodic as

this had been. He could not picture it as he could picture his old age at Coulscombe.

He thought of Father Gauden, certainly the first to whom he would tell the news. But from that friend he would not hear the judgment he wanted, for the simple reason that Father Gauden always treated him as a better and nobler man than he knew himself to be. "This news," he would say, "gives you just the chance you want for bringing Tory principles from the country to the town. You have a magnificent life before you." That was all very well, but Bobby liked other things besides being a hero. He liked, for example, hunting and shooting and entertaining nice people at Coulscombe. And when he took the rôle of the beneficent leader of men he liked it to be among people who were sturdy and pleasant and steady in the eye, of whom he could suppose that in some imagined battle they would fight for him.

95

The morning of that day did not add to his liking for Denbury or sweeten the prospect of a lifelong connection with it. As a rule his time had been spent lately on horseback between the places where his men were working, but this day, because he was to have a long holiday after Easter Monday, and had stayed this week-end in Denbury for the purpose of clearing things up, there was a terrible bout of paper work and accounts. He was assisted by Father Gauden for a time, and afterwards by the Trevors, but no help could make the work pleasant to him. Like many of the country people of the generation before his own he was almost sick when he had to deal with such figures as he could not carry in his head. Father Gauden, also, took the news about the factory just as he had foreseen, and offered him the unwelcome congratulations he had expected

After luncheon he should have gone to see the Denbury boys at football. Eddie Durwold had promised to come and be umpire, and to stay with him, and go on to Coulscombe after Monday. He went to the station to meet the train in which Eddie should have travelled. He thought affectionately, "Eddie is a little devil; he will tell me I should be glad to get the money; he 'll do me a damn lot of good." But the train arrived, and Eddie was not in it.

"Then," said Bobby, "I will shirk the football and go and see Williams."

He walked up to the White Hart and saddled Talgai, the fresher of the two horses he kept there. As he trotted out of Denbury he found himself considerably relieved, although a dismal rain began to fall. The virtuous family of Lord Williams would not refresh him quite as much as Eddie, in whom he enjoyed the impish spirit, but they would talk sensibly and say if he should take the day's news as a blessing or a curse. They would talk no heroics. If the rain continued, he might get a game of billiards. He might also be pressed to stay and have tea, and be persuaded to cut the annoying appointments which Father Gauden had made for him at four o'clock.

Lady Williams, an avowed victim of Bobby's personal attractions, petted him as usual. But afterwards, in the smoking room, Lord Williams disappointed him very much.

"Of course, my dear fellow," he said, "if this means that you will be a neighbour, you know very well that we shan't exactly grumble. And as for you, I can only congratulate you with all my heart."

"Yes," said Bobby, "I suppose it means my having a house here, and bringing my wife, and then it would be perfect hell if I hadn't a feeling you 'd be nice to us. We shall be making crockery, but we shall be pretty grateful for any friends."

"My dear Wilton!" said Lord Williams.

"You 've been angelic," Bobby declared.

This turn of sentiment was a bad prelude to what Lord Williams proposed to say, but when they had smoked in silence for five seconds he made his plunge.

"God knows," he said, "I 've no right to criticise, but I can't help wondering if you wouldn't be wiser to have a manager here and stick to your own home. You know we should like to have you, but I 've my doubts. You 'll have a lot of disappointment, a devilish lot of disappointment, Wilton. You get on well enough with the boys, I know, and the decent sort of men, but—that 's where I criticise you and Gauden—the world doesn't consist of the decent sort. No, it doesn't at all. Now see what 's been happening, and mark me, I 'm not the only one that has noticed it. As soon as some fellow shirks and grumbles and shows the ordinary rottenness of town breeding, up you haul him to judgment. If he 's a lad, he gets a cursing from you or a licking from your men, and naturally he bucks up because boys like that sort of thing, and they 're young enough to learn. But if he 's a free and independent rotter of full age, out he goes, and there 's weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now that won't work in a factory, it won't work at all. It 's not only that I feel you 'll end by being devilish unpopular, but I 'm afraid your whole scheme's wrong, you know. From what I read I take it the thing the world 's after is a way of making everybody happy, rotters and good boys together. That 's the social question. Now that 's why your plan won't work. You ignore the rotters. And the rotters have the votes and they won't stand it. It 's votes and not character that rule to-day, and you 'll come a cropper, your way, I 'm afraid you will, a bad one. That 's my criticism. All the same, my dear fellow, if you stick to your own notions, you can count on me for what I 'm worth here. It 's an attempt to solve the social question, even if it 's a wrong one, and

Heaven knows we ought to be grateful to any fellow who tries. Every one will watch you with a lot of interest, I 'm sure they will, all over the country. Even if you end by being lynched, you 'll certainly make a name for yourself. Well, there 's my advice for what it 's worth."

96

Bobby, while he listened to this kindly spoken warning, was watching the steam that rose from his boots and leggings as they dried before the fire. There was not much to show how he was affected, except that the colour deepened on his cheeks. A very close observer might have noticed that he was throwing up little embankments to keep his feelings from escaping, shifting slightly in his chair, sucking his lips, doubling and redoubling his determined attention to his outstretched legs. When it was over, when Lord Williams had finished, he said that of course there was plenty to be argued on each side of the question, and that he would naturally do nothing without a lot of thought. This he seemed willing to say as many times as Lord Williams liked, and in as many different ways as he could think of, but he would say no more. So Lord Williams presently asked him to play billiards, and he played without any of those vigorous comments he was wont to pass upon his own strokes. He would not stay to have tea, but left the house soon after four o'clock satisfactorily late for his appointments.

Though it was raining, and though he was late, he walked his horse, perversely pleased to cause the maximum inconvenience to every one, including Talgai and himself.

Bobby had a curious belief, which few will share, that it is not gentlemanly to be conspicuous. Dukes, bishops, cabinet ministers, and such people, he knew to have a positive duty in the way of public prominence, but he was convinced that persons like himself were dishonoured if they

attracted much attention. It was a principle against which he sometimes offended, generally under the influence of an attack of pugnacity; but he could not endure prominence for any length of time except at Coulscombe where his prominence was natural. And he, of all people in the world, was to be watched with sympathetic interest by persons in all parts of England while he tried to solve the Social Question.

Words cannot describe how the idea annoyed him, or how unfair it seemed. That he should be prig enough to attempt such a thing! To make himself, as Lord Williams said, a name! As if he wanted a name! To have the admiring gaze of serious multitudes turned on his virtuous endeavours to reform the State and accomplish the public weal! To excite the pitying amusement of all nice ordinary people, and jolly fellows, and sensible women! And all because he wanted to stick to the ideas in which he had been brought up, and to apply them to his wife's work people! Wise indeed, as it seemed, were his doubts that morning as to whether the good news about the factory was really good news or bad. One thing, at any rate, was certain. He would not submit to the fate that Lord Williams anticipated. He would leave Denbury, never to return. He would do something for those few Denbury men and boys who had been true to him, but he would do it very privately. For the town as a whole he would do no more, and the factory should be sold. He would go home and stay at Coulscombe where he could behave like a gentleman without "making a name."

So he rode on, through the drizzle, over the dreary hill, a deeply offended young man, until he modestly remembered that he was perhaps less sinned against than sinning. He had brought it all upon himself. From the moment when he set out to war against Miss Baker, he should have known that it would end like this in politics, economics, and

vulgarity. He admitted this much, and became no longer angry but merely depressed.

Thereupon he reached a sort of nadir of gloom, throwing away all his faith in everything, as a bankrupt in a temper throws away his watch and chain, for he remembered that it was by this very road, and under the same dull skies, that he had entered Denbury fifteen weeks ago with Michael and Kinglove, Dick and Tom, Dennet and Willie, and young Durwold, actually thinking that there was to be a fight. With his present experience of what Denbury and town life were really like he could now pronounce himself, not without pleasure, to have been, on that former occasion, the most——

He considered, chose, and actually spoke aloud to Talgai the epithets that were to qualify the final word "fool." A masterpiece it was, yet he never reached the end of the list.

He was checked, as completely and effectually as if Talgai had pitched him over head and ears, by hearing, at first faintly as a sound that merely resembles something else, then more clearly as a sound that may really be the thing itself, then surely as a sound that can be nothing else, the distant roar of the hooting and booing of a crowd in the town of Denbury below him.

97

He pulled up, that he might listen better. It was not the first time that he had heard booing in Denbury. But there was a difference. What he had heard on past occasions was the hooting of small gangs of roughs. The present sounds, arriving in such volume from such a distance, almost a mile away, were evidence of something more serious. They could only mean that Denbury had at last resolved itself into a mob of respectable proportions.

"Now what in the world has happened?" he thought, "and whose blood can they possibly want unless it 's mine?"

Considering the mood he had been in, and the horrid things Lord Williams had said, it was almost impossible to believe that anything could have happened so supremely satisfactory as a concerted attack by the townspeople upon himself, whether they meant to hang him from a lamp-post, or, as was very much more likely, to put him under the pump. To have a row at last, before he left the town, to have things out, to bring things back from the Social Question to the simple plane on which he understood them, to have the challenge of democracy put fairly and squarely from Denbury to him, under the circumstances, was too sweet and comforting a thought to entertain. He could see no reason why it should happen. He could think of nothing that could have brought it about, till, suddenly, with the utmost excitement, he remembered what would well account for it. They had heard of the revival of the business. They had heard that the factory was to re-open, and that he would probably be among them now as a permanency. This was their welcome! This was their challenge!

From the crown of his head to the tips of his toes every corpuscle got the news and broke into a scamper of excitement. He waited just an instant to judge the situation. The crowd, he thought, was probably in the square. They would suppose him to be in the White Hart, where he ought to have been half an hour ago. He could enter the White Hart by the back way into the yard, unless it were blocked, which was a very unlikely thing for a Denbury crowd to think of doing. All was well, therefore. There was no need to raise or solve more problems. "Oh, Talgai, be quick," he pleaded. He dug his heels into Talgai's flanks with a message of desperate urgency, and held his breath as Talgai went off.

Nothing could have justified his feelings but the knowledge that he had a whiff of grape-shot for that angry crowd, which he certainly had not, yet his frame of mind was that of one who has. Excitement carried him quite out of himself. Talgai, at a wild gallop on the badly metalled road, must have thought him suddenly mad. They tore down the long easy hill past Father Gauden's convent and past the five or six villas that are Denbury's attempt at a residential suburb, and, as is pathet c to state, Bobby's heart was nearer to the joy of the angels than it had been at any of the more virtuous moments of this story. Though the sound of Talgai's hoofs interfered with the noise in the town, the latter grew louder and more real. It made Bobby very nearly unconscious, a fact which is almost dreadful—that in a crisis all one's nicest qualities become perfectly mechanical. He had sense enough to put the matter more or less like this—that if his democratic friends in Denbury supposed him to be in the White Hart, in the White Hart he would be. All else was a blur.

He met no one. This was natural, as the excitement in the square would draw all the people thither. Where the road branches he took the way that would lead him, not to the square, but to the back of the White Hart, and into the yard through a gateway straight ahead of him, through which, if the gates were open, he could pass without slackening his wild pace. The hooting, now easy to distinguish as coming from the square, a dull and booming sound more suggestive of a grim purpose than of immediate violence, still caused him to fear, however hard he rode, that he might arrive for some reason too late. As it grew louder with the diminishing distance, excitement and impatience drove him more furiously. He met no obstacle, not a cart or a person. The gates of the yard came in sight. They stood open. Thankful for this, he was making for the yard without

slackening his pace when he was reminded that the world contained other people besides himself and the crowd. Robin Dennet stood in the gateway, smiling and beckoning with his hand. Though he might have ignored his nearest kinsfolk, the sight of a Coulscombe face had an effect on the selfishness of his mood, for he guessed rightly that Dennet had been keeping the gate clear for him, which was very proper of Dennet.

"Good boy!" he said, as he passed him.

"It 's all right, sir," cried Dennet. "I 'll shut the gates first."

Talgai, who might have been glad of an explanation, stopped as soon as was possible, and walked towards the stable.

"Come on, sir, please," cried Dennet, running after him. "Let 's get into the house, sir. They may have heard you coming. They might get in. We 're all ready inside, sir. Sir John Rannard is there with a motor at the door. Tom 's looking out of a top window to see if you come into the square, but I 'll call him down, sir, and we 'll be able to get to the motor and go through them."

"Bless my soul, we don't want a motor," said Bobby. He was fully restored to consciousness, now, and aware that he must behave himself.

"Where 's Dick?" he asked.

"Inside, sir."

"And Sir John Rannard? Has he come down from London? Why, that 's five of us! Oh, that 's capital. How long have they been out there?"

"Quarter of an hour, sir."

"They think I 'm inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why haven't they broken in?"

"They 're waiting for you to go out to the motor, sir."

"Did Mr. Durwold come?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he all right?"

"Yes, sir. And he 'll fight sir, too."

"Good. My word! That 's six of us. Is Matt Blood about?"

"No, sir."

"Never mind! Six of us! Oh, what a pity we haven't got some of the others."

They shut the stable door on Talgai, unceremoniously, without seeing to his comforts, and hurried to the back door of the house. It was a fact that to be six was more fun than to be one. Bobby did not see the unrelieved red he had seen before, but he had the pleasure of knowing that he would be in the best company he could have chosen out of all the world when he invited the democrats of Denbury to show him exactly how much they dared try to do to him.

So they entered the hotel by the kitchen passage and passed through the swing doors to the hall.

98

It was a more dramatic scene than Bobby had expected. He had expected a little knot of friends, but he found a large audience assembled. In the background, so to speak, and seeming more terrible in here than it had seemed in the open air, was the ceaseless *Boo-oo-oo-oo* of the mob outside. The nine-foot oak door of the hotel, leading to the square, was shut and barred. It was a symbol of beleaguerment, with the enemy just the other side of it. All round, against the walls, were people standing with scared faces; men near the bar with their drinks in their hands, maidservants in a cluster at the foot of the staircase, and, at other points, accidental victims of the cataclysm, commercial travellers, a tourist or two, and some tradespeople of the town. In the place of prominence in the midst was a group whose faces

Bobby began to recognise as he took in the nature of what he saw, Jock, Wilfred, Father Gauden, and Eddie, whose presence was no surprise, and others who made him wonder indeed. For he saw his solicitor, Mr. Baldwin, and Miss Baker, and Mrs. Hope. All heads were turned towards him.

The joy of battle was distinctly chilled. His pugnacity began to be severely hampered by self-consciousness. He advanced a few paces, and then stood still, and looked about him, very much on his dignity yet not able to keep from his unvarying gesture when perplexed, for he began to tap his shin with his whip. Wilfred Rannard came up to him, rather emotionally, and put his arm round his neck saying, "Come along, Bobby, we 'll have the fun of our lives." But Bobby stood still, obstinately shy.

For a moment no one appeared to have anything to do except to stare at him in silence, while the formidable roar of the crowd continued as usual. Then Jock took command of the performance, while the onlookers began to press nearer.

"I 'm glad you 've got in safely," he said, speaking with unconcealed passion, "and before anything else happens I should like to tell you that the crowd outside is waiting to pull you to pieces, if they can get at you, because those women—those women—" he pointed at Miss Baker and Mrs. Hope and two others whom Bobby did not know—"have accused you of torturing children! They have been forced to admit that every word they have said is a lie, but they 've done the mischief, and they 'll be responsible for what happens."

"And I say," said Miss Baker, dark with passion, "that there 'd have been no trouble if you hadn't set this trap to humiliate us, and I tell you again as I 've told you fifty times— open that door and leave the crowd to *me!* Do you think I want to have that boy murdered? Do you think I can't manage that crowd?"

"Sir Robert," said a young man in a tweed coat and grey flannel trousers, before any one else could speak, "I and my friends have been partly responsible for this, for we didn't know the story was a lie and we came over to set the crowd upon you. We heard the story from Mr. Colquhoun of Oxford, and we spread it, we did, I confess, but we 'll stand by you now, and we 're awfully sorry, oh, most awfully sorry."

"Stand against that mob, you fool?" cried Miss Baker. "I tell you not a soul in the world can stop that mob except me. Who taught them? Who made them? Who put that noise in their throats? And they hate him justly, justly, justly," she added addressing the whole assemblage, her voice breaking in a sob, "but I 'll save him if you 'll give me half a chance."

The theatrical effect can be imagined. Between the roar of the mob outside and the passions of the garrison within, the onlookers were completely spellbound, and, as for the bright suggestions that people make on such occasions, nobody dared even think of one.

The organ of hearing which was nearest to Bobby's mouth was the right ear of Wilfred, who still clung to him.

"Go and open the door," he muttered, as though he were saying "for goodness' sake put a stop to this scene."

"Look here," said Jock, taking hold of another part of his person, "any minute they 'll break in. My car 's outside; they 've smashed the glass, I suppose, but it 's probably all right otherwise. The only thing is to open the door and make a rush and get into the car and drive through them. Now for God's sake be sensible. You fellows must go and start the wheel, do you see, one to turn and the rest to protect, and we 'll get in and go off. It 'll all be so quick they won't have a chance. Bobby, *do* you see?"

"I don't want to go off in your car or any one else's,"

said Bobby. "Why the devil can't you clear these people away?"

The voice of outraged common sense began to reply, "*For Goodness' Sake*——"

Bobby turned and saw Dick Trevor as close upon his right hand as Wilfred on his left.

"Open that door!" he said.

He began to advance.

"Perfect lunacy!" Jock grumbled, "it is really."

"Oh, damn," cried Wilfred, "let Bobby have his way. Let Bobby have his way! Come *along!*"

Other voices took the cue. "Shall I open it, Mr. Bobby?" "Oh, let 's meet 'em!" "Out of the way! Out of the way!" "Stick together!"

"Stop, as you value your lives!" cried Miss Baker. "Oh, you fools, why don't you let me *deal* with them?"

"It was my fault," wailed Eddie, choosing this singular moment for his confession. Poor Eddie had only the consolation of resolving that if any one was damaged, he would be damaged first. They were advancing towards the door in close order as though already among the crowd. "This is chess," Father Gauden observed coolly, "and Wilton is the king, so please all be careful of him." The spectators, the commercial travellers, and tradesmen and tourists, gathered up behind. As for Bobby, he did not feel shy any more. He had become accustomed to this scene, with the friends and the women and the numbers of strangers, and the big barred door in front, and the democracy behind it, and he had remembered that he had a standard to maintain even among so many people. So he advanced towards the door and shook off the arms of those about him, and did not care how well Miss Baker could deal with crowds, nor consider Mrs. Hope who made a rush at h m, nor observe the commotion among the interested onlookers, nor take any pleasure when Wilfred cheered him on, nor when Tom and

Robin came panting from the top of the house, just in time, but only repeated to Dick the one order he could possibly give, the only thing he could possibly do, if ever again he was to be pleased with things, if ever he was to despise the People with its big P, if ever he was to go back among his own folk at Coulscombe, he could only repeat his order—"Open the door!"

Dick shot back the bolt. The door swung in towards them. The infuriated roar was multiplied a hundred fold, and there appeared, squeezed through the aperture against all the fists that were ready for him, the unexpected figure of the stout and sweating landlord of the White Hart.

His news, too, was unexpected.

"God above us!" he cried, "why couldn't you open the door before? Sir Robert, Sir Robert, mercy's sake, go out to them! It 's Blood and the lads has done it. It 's not you they 're after, it 's them four young men on cycles that came to set on you!"

99

What can be more annoying than wanting your tea and trying to boil a kettle on a fire that will not burn up for the simple reason that the authorities have economised on the quality of their coal? Jock held a copy of the *Cotswold Leader* across the grate. Eddie, on his knees, was at work with a pair of bellows. Wilfred, standing near, helped them with some sorrowful but forceful objurgations. To ring the bell and ask for tea from the kitchen was out of the question, for the inhabitants of the White Hart were beyond control, and, in fact, not to be found. There was nothing for it but to look after oneself.

"Is the tea ready in the teapot when the kettle boils?" Eddie asked.

"Yes," said Jock. "I say, I suppose Bobby *is* all right?"

"He 's all right," said Wilfred, "unless they *break* him. You mustn't judge by the yelling. When I went out to look, he was being marched round the square on the special shoulders of all the boys whose behinds he has had tanned from the beginning until now, and the crowd is doing the rest. It 's very undignified, but there was nothing to be done, so I came back. He 's perfectly safe if they don't *break* him. It 's very awful, because he 'll never be dignified again, but it 's not really dangerous."

"We ought to telegraph to Marian," said Jock.

"Dick 's doing it," said Wilfred. "I wrote it out. It 's a telegram as long as a baby novel. It will allay all possible anxiety."

"How long will they go on like that?"

"Probably till midnight."

"I say—that signed apology!"

"That 's all right too," he said. "Miss Baker is not feeling well, but Baldwin has got Mrs. Hope at the door to hand the apology to him when he comes in. And I 'm sure I don't know if she 's mad or merely drunk but she 's as keen as anything now to make him president of a new league that she has started in the last five minutes with a name a yard long ending in "Social Discipline."

"Oh! Stop! Quick!" cried Eddie. "It 's boiling over and putting the fire out."

100

Bobby joined them, at last, a little ruffled by events but possibly more pleased than he admitted. He was pleased, at any rate, when they gave him a cup of tea. He listened carefully to a full and truthful account of the campaign against his cruelty to children, including its origin at Maryhill, and when it was finished, he took hold of Eddie's throat. Thus, holding the worst of his slanderers in his

power, he did two things. He extorted a promise that Eddie would come with him to Coulscombe on Monday, whatever punishment he gave him now. Then he hit him between the eyes, three times, just hard enough to hurt.

But it was not until they were in bed that night in his house in Church Street, after a fairly cheery evening, that he told the full tale of the damage Eddie's act had wrought. Such a confession could only be made in the dark. It could only be made when sleepiness would prevent much comment. "I 'd meant to leave my Denbury boys in the lurch, and let them rip," he said, "but after to-day I shall have to stick to them; oh, Eddie, I shall have to stick to them as long as I live."

THE END

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